

Subgroup on COP11

Report of preparations for COP11

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to take note of the current status of the preparations for the holding of COP11 in Bucharest in June 2012 and to offer its advice as appropriate.

Introduction

1. This document summarizes the essential information concerning the ongoing preparations for the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. The preparations for COP11, to be held in the capital of Romania, Bucharest, from 19-26 June 2012, are driven by the host country in close cooperation with the Ramsar Secretariat. The 11th Meeting of the COP will be preceded by the 44th Meeting of Standing Committee on 17 June and by regional meetings on 18 June at the COP premises in Bucharest.
2. The present paper provides the baseline information on the issues to be dealt with in more detail, with updated information, during the meeting of the Subgroup on COP11 to be held immediately prior to the opening of the 42nd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC42). A report on the outcomes of the meeting of the Subgroup will be tabled under agenda item 7 of SC42 and will present the conclusions and recommendations reached by the Subgroup to the full Standing Committee.
3. Romania will make an illustrated presentation on the first two points (Romania and its wetlands, venue of COP11) during the plenary session of Standing Committee. The following paragraphs provide a summary of key information provided by the host country Romania, about its wetlands and national wetlands policy and the COP11 venue in Bucharest, followed by a status report on the preparatory work. This is structured according to major operational issues currently addressed by the organizing team in Romania in close cooperation with and with the support of the Convention Secretariat.
4. The Standing Committee is requested to note the points addressed here and to be addressed in the Subgroup report to be tabled under agenda item 7 of SC42, and to take the decisions necessary to guide the further preparatory work for COP11, including indicating ways to cover remaining funding requirements through additional voluntary financial contributions by Ramsar Parties or other institutions.

Introduction to Romania, its wetlands and national wise use policy

5. Romania is a country with outstanding biodiversity, present both at species and ecosystems level. This is due to geographical and physical conditions that include mountains, plains, major river networks, wetlands and the largest delta in Europe, the Danube Delta. An important part of the natural protected areas and the “Natura 2000” sites, protected in

accordance with the European Union Directives on Wild Birds and Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats, are composed of wetlands with a special protection and conservation status.

6. The Ramsar Convention came into force for Romania on 21 September 1991. Romania presently has five sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance, with a total surface area of 683,628 hectares, and three other proposals for designation. The listed Ramsar Sites are:
 - **Danube Delta** – of outstanding universal value, also designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Property
 - **Small Island of Braila** – Natural Park
 - **Mures Floodplain** - Natural Park, Important Bird Area
 - **Dumbravita Fishpond Complex** - Special Protection Area (Natura 2000)
 - **Lake Techirghiol** – Special Protection Area (Natura 2000)

7. The three additional Ramsar Sites soon to be designated for the List are:
 - The **Iron Gate Natural Park**, situated in southwestern Romania at the border with Serbia, stretching over 115,655 hectares partially on territories belonging to the administrative competence of Caras Severin and Mehedinti Counties south of the Locvei and Almajului mountains in the southwestern part of the Mehedinti plateau. The Ramsar listing of this site is ongoing and likely to be completed by the time of SC42.
 - The **Poiana Stampei Peat Bog** is situated in Suceava County in northern Romania, between the villages of Poiana Stampei and Dornișoar, coinciding with the existing Scientific Reserve Poiana Stampei, with a surface of 688 ha.
 - The **Comana Natural Park**, situated in the southern part of Romania in Giurgiu County, in the Romanian Plain. The boundaries of the future Ramsar Site overlap with the boundaries of the existing Comana Natural Park, covering 24,963 ha.

8. Wetland protection and the restoration of biological diversity, as well as the sustainable use of natural resources, are amongst the priority objectives of the nature conservation policy under the Romanian National Strategy and Action Plan for the Conservation of Biological Diversity. Another tool is the National Management Plan for the Danube Basin, containing objectives and quality standards for the protection and conservation of aquatic species, in accordance with the European Union Water Framework Directive. The national legislation foresees the development and implementation of the necessary management measures aimed at biodiversity conservation and sustainable development for areas of special interest for conservation.

9. Wetlands in transboundary areas represent environmental policy priorities for Romania. In this context, joint projects have been developed with neighboring countries for transboundary wetland complexes. Recently, Romania has started many projects and actions for protecting and preserving existing wetlands and for the ecological reconstruction of former flood areas, drained swamps, etc. In the Danube Delta some of the most conclusive examples of ecological wetland restoration can be found, notably through the successful restoration of some of Europe's largest polders: Babina (2,100 ha) and Cernovca (1,580 ha). The economic effects resulting from the restoration works are increasing quantities of harvestable fish and the extent of reedbeds, ecotourism and

environmental education opportunities, and the overall improvement of the livelihoods and living conditions of local people.

Information on the COP11 venue in Bucharest

10. The proposed venue for Ramsar COP11 is the Bucharest International Conference Centre (BICC) in the emblematic building of the Palace of the Parliament. The Palace is located in the heart of the historical centre of Bucharest, Romania's capital. Covering a total area of 365,000 m², it is the second largest administrative building in the world, and the third largest by volume, according to the Guinness Book of Records.
11. The architectural ensemble puts together not only impressive quantities of marble, steel, concrete and different woods, but also a huge amount of work. Genuine Romanian materials have been used and one can say that the entire country has contributed with something to the construction and decoration of the halls.
12. Since 1989, this building has become, owing to the institutions it hosts, the symbol of Romanian democracy. The Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, the Constitutional Court, and the Legislative Council are all located here. In order to improve transparency and communication, the International Conference Centre was founded on the 6th of May 1994 as a part of the Chamber of Deputies. It has become over its sixteen years of activity the link between the legislative forum and civil society.
13. The International Conference Centre has earned a particular fame through its generous and elegant spaces and its services according to European standards, granting it membership within the International Association of Congress Centres. Disposing of 10,000 m², the International Conference Centre has eight conference halls (with a capacity of 50 to 1,200 persons each), exhibition galleries, and foyers. Its halls can accommodate all types of meetings, varying from congresses and international conferences to seminars, workshops, exhibitions, fairs, symposiums, concerts and fashion shows, cocktails and dinner parties. Many such events have had a special impact on Romania's image abroad and attested once again the high level of organization and the services offered. We mention just the 12th Francophonie Summit organized in 2006 or the NATO Summit held in 2008.

Time plan of the preparations for the COP11

14. The Romanian host and the Ramsar Secretariat have agreed on a number of specific timelines to achieve specific tasks in preparation for the COP, according to the Memorandum of Understanding signed in November 2010. The following timelines for additional tasks of wider interest were presented and agreed upon during a common meeting held at the Ramsar Secretariat in Gland on 11 January 2011:
15. By **mid-February 2011**, diplomatic notifications about the *dates of COP11* and the deadline to submit *draft Resolutions* and *National Reports* were sent to all Parties.
16. Before **mid-June 2011**, a diplomatic notification will be sent as the *official invitation to COP11* with information about the *venue* and the *draft agenda* for the meeting and the deadline for submission of *draft Resolutions* by the Parties.

17. By **mid-August 2011**, a reminder with the deadline for the submission of *National Reports* and *draft Resolutions* will be sent out.
18. By the **end of August 2011**, *draft Resolutions* submitted by Parties need to reach the Secretariat, in order to be submitted in time to the 43rd meeting of Standing Committee on 31 October to 4 November 2011 (the presently proposed dates awaiting SC42 approval).
19. In **early February 2012**, the *first information mailing* will be sent to Parties and International Organization Partners (IOPs), as well as to observer states, with general information on how to pre-register for COP11 via the Web, with the provisional COP agenda, a list of COP11 documents, information on travel and accommodation, on visas, on the procedure to register for side events and exhibition space, and for excursions before, during and after the COP. Then, pre-registered participants who need a visa to enter Romania will receive a *personal invitation letter from Romania*.
20. At the **end of February 2012**, a diplomatic note about the need to prepare *credentials* for the delegations of Contracting Parties will be sent, followed by a reminder two months later.
21. By **mid-March 2012**, pre-registered participants will be made aware that they can download the *first COP documents (including all draft Resolutions)* from the Ramsar website and/or request to receive them on CD, three months prior to the opening of the COP, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure.
22. By **mid-April 2012**, Romania will produce a draft *delegates' handbook* in English for review by the Secretariat, prior to its translation into French and Spanish. This practical handbook will be available electronically on the Web two weeks before the COP and distributed in hard copy at registration on-site.
23. By **mid-May 2012**, a *second COP document mailing* will be sent out, one month before the COP11.

Media communication plan prior and during the COP

24. A Ramsar awareness raising and media communications action plan will be structured in two components: actions at national level in Romania and actions at international level. While the national component will essentially be coordinated and undertaken by the host country, the global media awareness and information campaign will be coordinated in close cooperation between the host country and the Secretariat, hopefully with additional professional support from specific additional voluntary Ramsar Parties and IOPs.
25. The planned awareness actions at national level will be:
 - a) promoting the Ramsar COP in Bucharest in all the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MEF) actions, organized to mark the International Year of Forests 2011;
 - b) monthly actions of the Ministry for promoting the Ramsar COP 2012;
 - c) promotion of the Ramsar COP in Bucharest on 29 June 2011, when the MEF will celebrate Danube Day with the International Commission for the Protection of the

- Danube River (ICPDR). The Ministry of Environment and Forests will emphasise the communication on the Blue Globe award received by the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Administration in Nagoya;
- d) promoting the Ramsar COP in Minister Laszlo Borbely's interviews to media channels;
 - e) carrying out a media campaign:
 - logo design
 - online site launch
 - online banners posted on different websites of the environmental institutions or NGOs for promoting the Ramsar Conference
 - TV spot creation, print layouts and dissemination in the framework of a media campaign, in 2012;
 - f) launching a philatelic edition, which will be held during the opening event of the the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention in Bucharest.
26. The global awareness and information campaign at international level will consist of:
- a) organizing media events by Romanian diplomatic representations for the Parties of the Ramsar Convention. The events will take place on the same day for all countries;
 - b) promoting the Ramsar COP through an online banner to be posted on the websites of the Ramsar Parties' environmental Ministries and Agencies and other relevant public institutions;
 - c) media campaign with TV coverages (cover stories) broadcast on international channels and an online banner published on high traffic sites.
27. The Romanian organizers will cooperate closely with the Ramsar Secretariat on the media awareness and communications campaign before, during and after COP11. The Subgroup on COP11 is invited to make proposals on how additional Parties and the IOPs could help in implementing a global awareness and information campaign by making best use of the modern mass media.

Proposals for COP11 logo and slogan

28. In Decision SC41-8, the Standing Committee "agreed that the theme for World Wetlands Day 2012 and COP11 should be linked and related to the broad theme of 'Wetlands, Tourism, and Recreation', with the exact wording to be formulated at a later date". A list of proposed suggestions for a COP slogan and different logo designs for COP11 will be sent by Romania to the Secretariat at the beginning of April 2011, and the Secretariat will make them available to the Subgroup on COP11. Thus, the Subgroup will be able to make a selection and submit a concrete proposal to SC42.
29. After adoption of the COP11 logo and slogan by SC42, the host country, in coordination with the Secretariat, will begin promoting and using these communications, awareness and Ramsar branding tools rapidly and widely in the lead-up for the preparations of COP11.

Additional funding needs

30. The Memorandum of Understanding between Romania and the Secretariat was signed on 11 November 2010 with annexed assurances from Romania that they have a “sufficiently large, but flexible budget”, including provision for costs such as registration, interpretation and translation that are typically incurred by the Secretariat but paid for by the host country. The Secretariat and Romania are aware of some funding shortfalls and discussing strategies to deal with this possibility, including the identification of additional voluntary donations and potential sponsoring agreements with the business sector in Romania. The Secretariat and Romania will update the Subgroup on the details of this during the meeting. Romania has expressed hope that additional Ramsar Parties might be able to help.
31. However, the Secretariat is also anxious to ensure that Parties do not forget their additional responsibility in terms of raising funds to sponsor delegates to the meeting. Contributions of one million CHF will be sought by the Secretariat for this.

Registration of participants and access to the COP venue

32. Pre-registration will be done online via the Ramsar Convention website and all applications for participation will be screened by the Secretariat. A password will be needed to pre-register online, and this password will be conveyed to Contracting Parties and other invitees in order to restrict unwanted applicants. The Romanian organizers informed the Secretariat that there would be no need for photos or security codes on Ramsar badges because all pre-registered participants will be listed, and only those people on the list and carrying with them a valid photo identification document, such as passport or ID card, will be allowed to enter the Conference venue.

Visa delivery

33. Romania has been a Member State of the European Union since 2007 and plans to be part of the Schengen area by the time of COP11. The Schengen area represents a territory where the free movement of persons is guaranteed. The signatory states to the agreement have abolished all internal borders in lieu of a single external border. Here common rules and procedures are applied with regard to visas for short stays. Therefore the relevant EU (and Schengen) immigration rules will apply for COP11 participants from countries needing a visa to enter the Schengen area (or the territory of the EU in case Romania should not be part of the Schengen area by the time of COP11). Visas are normally issued for the entire Schengen area, i.e., they also cover the possible need for a transfer visa at major European airport hubs in the Schengen area (e.g. Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Paris, Vienna, Madrid, Brussels, Rome, Athens) to board a flight to Bucharest. If Romania were not part of the Schengen area by the time of COP11, a specific visa to enter Romania would be required, as well as in case of transit, possibly a Schengen visa.
34. Romania has noted that there are a number of countries with no Romanian consulate in the country. In those countries, normally another EU consulate would be able to issue a Schengen area visa permitting entry into Romania and transit through other European countries. For those very few countries with neither a Romanian nor another EU consulate, however, the issue of visas will be more complicated. Romania has promised to seek input from other EU countries on their recent experiences in dealing with visa issues for international conference participants and will keep the Subgroup on COP11 informed of its progress on this.

36. Given the applicable EU regulations, no visas can be obtained on arrival. In addition, participants need to be warned by the Secretariat that obtaining visas within a very short period of time will not be possible, given the EU/Schengen procedures applicable.
37. The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs will produce a list of countries where visa difficulties can be expected. This list will also include countries in the process of acceding to the Ramsar Convention, and non-Contracting Parties, because these are especially encouraged to attend the COP as well. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will furthermore explore visa fast track solutions for late registrants in exceptional cases and share them with the Secretariat.
38. The Subgroup on COP11 is invited to address any further issues concerning immigration and visa procedures for participants at COP11 during its meeting on 17 May, in order to make concrete proposals to SC42 about any possible further clarifications needed.