



Report and Recommendations

of the 7th European Ramsar Meeting

27–30 September 2011

Trnava - Slovak Republic



Summary of the Meeting

Aims

The Meeting addressed major themes that influence the ways to manage and use water-related ecosystems during the coming years. The participants identified areas of successful cooperation between different sectors of society, administration and private business. National Ramsar Convention focal points from the Ministries, together with experts for scientific and technical matters (STRP) and those in charge of national programmes for communication, education, participation and awareness (CEPA), NGO representatives and sustainable development experts, looked at progress made with the implementation of the wetland convention. They exchanged their experiences, updated newcomers about environmental challenges in the water sector, and elaborated recommendations how best to make use in the long term of ecosystem services provided by wetlands. The expected outcomes from the Meeting were:

- ♦ *to obtain a better understanding where we are standing with Ramsar implementation,*
- ♦ *to develop a sense of priorities for action and to close remaining gaps,*
- ♦ *to start our active preparation for COP11 in June 2012, and*
- ♦ *to elaborate concrete recommendations for actions to be undertaken during the months to come.*

Participants

The Meeting was held at the Holiday Inn conference hotel in the historical centre of Trnava. It was opened by the Mayor of Trnava, *Vladimír Butko*, the Slovak Minister of the Environment, *József Nagy*, and the Ramsar Convention Deputy Secretary General, *Nick Davidson*. It was attended by 123 participants, representing 32 Contracting Parties (70% of a total of 46 in the European region, including Azerbaijan), two of Ramsar's five International Organisation Partners, 10 international organizations and two invited Ramsar experts.

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

Hosts and financial support

The Meeting was hosted by the Slovak Ministry of the Environment (the Ramsar administrative authority in Slovakia) and the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic. They covered the Meeting costs, with financial support from the European Union (through a project to raise environmental awareness, build capacity and manage wetland sites in Slovakia) and voluntary financial contributions (mainly for delegate support) by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, the Royal Norwegian Ministry of the Environment, the Finnish Ministry of the Environment, the Czech Ministry of the Environment, the Biosphere Connections partnership of the Star Alliance airlines (flights) and the Carpathian Wetland Initiative. Additional support was provided by the Slovak Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development, the Slovak Tourist Board, the Slovak Museum of Nature Conservation and Speleology and the city halls of Trnava and Skalica.

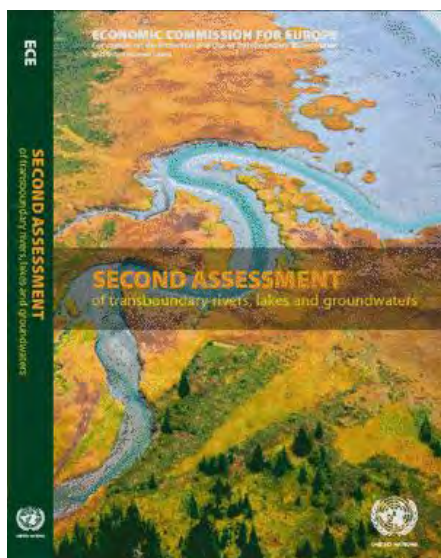
Programme and documents

The Meeting programme, annotated agenda, participants list, field trip guide, and the visual presentations shown are available on the Convention's website (as PDF): www.ramsar.org/COP11-regional-europe/ or can be obtained—on simple demand—from Europe@ramsar.org. Reference to COP11 negotiation documents (draft resolutions) is made using their SC43 numbers, because the Meeting took place at the time of final document preparation for the 43rd meeting of Standing Committee (SC43, 31 October-4 November 2011). SC43 subsequently finalized these documents for submission to COP11.

- ♦ *For a concise summary of the issues covered by the Meeting, please refer to the bullet-point conclusions following major chapters and to the conclusions at the end of this report under the heading "Outlook from Trnava to Bucharest".*

Why are wetlands relevant?

27 September 2011



No wetlands, no water – the Ramsar vision for the next 40 years

The Ramsar Secretariat seized the opportunity of the Convention's 40th anniversary to reflect on strategic priorities for the Convention during the coming years, in order to enhance effective implementation of its core values (cf. DOC. [SC43-09](#)). This exercise identified a unique selling position of Ramsar's know-how developed from the ecosystem approach, and the need to incorporate ecosystem concerns in the work of the water management sector, with the aim to improve inter-sectoral cooperation for integrated water resources management. The opening session of the Meeting provided an opportunity to acknowledge that cooperation with the water sector has started in Europe in 2008 through Ramsar's expert contribution to the elaboration of the **Second Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters** (UN document ECE/MP.WAT/33 available on www.unece.org/env/water/) that was launched on 21

September 2011 at the occasion of the 7th ministerial conference on the Environment for Europe.

Annukka Lipponen (UNECE Water Convention Secretariat) presented the main findings of this assessment and stressed the attention devoted therein to ecosystems through the assessment of 25 Ramsar Sites and other wetlands of transboundary importance. And *Boris Minárik* (International Water Assessment Centre) briefly presented the work of his centre that supports the implementation of the UNECE Water Convention with a particular focus on Eastern and South Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and on climate change adaptation and meta-database projects. They encouraged Ramsar experts:

- ◆ *to distribute the findings and recommendations of the Second Assessment widely,*
- ◆ *to develop exchanges with colleagues from the water management sector,*
- ◆ *to identify areas of common concern, shared interest and possible cooperation, and*
- ◆ *to develop concrete recommendations for joint actions in the near future.*

The Slovak contribution to Ramsar – and the Carpathian Wetland Initiative

Ján Kadlecík (Slovak State Nature Conservancy) outlined the integration of Slovak and European Union water and wetland management policies – a process that started with the independence of the country in 1993, and focuses on wetland inventory, monitoring, restoration, wise use and capacity building. He referred to the achievements of the Slovak wetland committee, the national wetland policy and through site-related projects. The 14 Slovak Ramsar Sites (40.000 ha) include karst wetlands, caves, fish ponds, marshes, floodplains, and four transboundary ecosystems. *Tereza Thompson* presented the developing regional cooperation in the framework of the Carpathian Wetland Initiative focusing on common ecosystem issues in the Carpathian biogeographical region with strong social and cultural linkages. Both presentations provided concrete illustrations of issues to be addressed in specific sessions on regional and transboundary cooperation later during the Meeting. They were supported by a special edition on wetlands (36 pages in English) of the illustrated **Enviro**magazín (Vol. 16/2011), published at the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention and distributed to all participants.



40th Anniversary Celebrations

On 28 September, the Ministry of Environment invited for an anniversary dinner. *Gordana Beltram* and *Thymio Papayannis*, two personalities with a long-standing Ramsar involvement, used this occasion to look back and to recall their pleasure to work with the large Ramsar family. A photo-show of major Ramsar Sites and events (prepared by the Secretariat) and a birthday cake (in the form of the Ramsar anniversary logo) provided the evening with a special touch.



Presentation of the major issues to be negotiated at COP11

From the Ramsar Secretariat, *Nick Davidson* provided an overview of the topics addressed in the technical draft resolutions in preparation for Ramsar COP11 in Bucharest in June 2012 (cf. SC43 documents on www.ramsar.org). *Tobias Salathé* outlined the programme of the Meeting sessions to come and explained how they address Ramsar's five **Strategic Goals**: wise use, Ramsar Sites, international cooperation, global membership, institutional capacity and effectiveness.

He stressed the fact that by the deadline of 15 September only 18 out of 46 European **National Reports** for COP11 were received by the Secretariat and encouraged Parties to send the missing ones rapidly.

He summarized the difficult **financial situation** faced by the Secretariat in 2011 and 2012, due to late and incomplete payments of annual dues by a substantial number of Parties, and the possible unpleasant consequences this may provoke for the work of the Secretariat. He outlined the structure of the Convention budget for 2013-2015, to be submitted to COP11, composed of a *core budget* (covered by assessed annual contributions) and a *non-core budget* (to implement additional aspects of the Strategic Plan), and three scenarios for the core budget: flat (as in 2012), zero growth (with inflation coverage of 2%), and modest growth (of overall 4%).

He also referred to the detailed reports available (on the Convention's website) by the ad hoc working group on **administrative reform**, analysing the options for the Secretariat to either remain administered by IUCN (with improvements), or becoming administered by UNEP. He informed the participants that no consensus on either option to choose was achieved by the working group (cf. DOC. [SC43-13](#)), and that this would probably also be the case during COP11 (with a majority of the Parties being in favour of UNEP, and a minority to remain with IUCN). He made the participants aware of the fact that the future of UNEP may depend on decisions to be taken by the Rio+20 global summit in June 2012, just prior to COP11, and that the Parties are advised to think about possible third options to be pursued (such as a possible rapprochement of the Ramsar Secretariat with UNESCO) in case no decision would be taken by COP11 on the IUCN vs. UNEP option.

As a last issue, he presented the need to elect (at least) two new **European members for Standing Committee** (replacing the outgoing Czech Republic and Georgia, anticipating that Croatia and Finland would remain). The candidates for Standing Committee will need to be agreed by the European regional meeting taking place in Bucharest on 18 June 2012, just prior to COP11, in order that they can participate in the daily meetings of the Conference Committee during the COP (i.e. the Standing Committee). This will allow a more effective entry

into operation of the newly composed Standing Committee and its new officers (chair, vice-chair, chair of the finance sub-group). The proposed changes for the operation of Standing Committee (cf. DOC. SC43-17) also mention that the Netherlands will no longer be a permanent observer (but eligible as a full member), and that the situation of Switzerland (as the host country of the Secretariat) will need to be defined (becoming either an *ex officio* or an eligible member, or remain a permanent observer). In case it wishes to become part of the European region, Azerbaijan would have to make a formal request to this end during COP11.

As a follow-up to this session, and in preparation for COP11, Ramsar national focal points were asked:

- ◆ *to consult the draft resolutions for COP11 (submitted to SC43 for final approval and submission to COP), to prepare their position on these negotiation documents, to caucus with other Parties about common positions, and to inform the Secretariat if they wish to have discussions on specific COP11 draft resolutions during the European meeting on 18 June 2012 in Bucharest just prior to the opening of COP11,*
- ◆ *to send National Reports for COP11 to the Secretariat by 31 October 2011 the latest in order to assure their analysis for COP11,*
- ◆ *to pay outstanding annual dues rapidly, and to convince other Parties in arrears to do the same, in order to avoid possible staff reductions at the Ramsar Secretariat,*
- ◆ *to prepare nominations for European members of Standing Committee, in order that the final nominations (of countries and individuals) can be agreed during the European meeting prior to COP11 on 18 June 2012 in Bucharest.*

Why wetland conservation is politically relevant

The afternoon session focused on aspects that make wetland ecosystems relevant for those who are not yet directly involved in wetland management and who are probably not yet convinced about the necessity to invest in wetland ecosystems. It aimed to identify areas of common interest and synergies to be developed with existing and with new partners, including opportunities to work together for water-related ecosystems with farmers, foresters, fishermen, field sports, navigation people, energy experts, and others.

Andy Farmer (Institute for European Environmental Policy) moderated the session and introduced the theme by stressing the need to understand and capture **wetland values** (including non-monetary values) and how to best include these in decision-making. Currently, provisioning services are appreciated by the economy, but regulating and supporting services are not. This produces a skewed decision-making and the loss of value of other services. Ramsar is pioneering the reflection on wetland services, their role in the water cycle, and wise use. Often, the cost of maintaining or restoring wetland infrastructure is cheaper than to construct new structures. *Jan-Petter Huberth Hansen* (national focal point) announced that Norway was going to finance the preparation of a TEEB-assessment for water-related ecosystems for COP11. This will help to clarify which wetland services we understand well and which not so well, what governance structures enable ecosystem services decision-making, and which ones make it hard, and how we can address the private sector in decision-making?

Gerhard Schwach (Austrian focal point) presented the most relevant **European Union policy and finance instruments** currently used for wetland management (Water Framework Directive, Habitats/Birds Directives, Flood Protection Directive, Biodiversity Strategy, ERDF and Cohesion Funds, Interreg, Axis 3 of rural development funds (diversifying the rural economy, including tourism activities, improved quality of life and rural heritage), LIFE+, and accession and neighbourhood funds for non-EU countries. He illustrated his overview with references to specific projects on the restoration of river floodplains, improvement of water management and fish migration, management of karst forest catchments, peatland restoration, and Ramsar Sites training and education centres. In addition, *David Pithart* (STRP focal point) provided an illustrated hydrological and socio-economical analysis of wetland management and restoration activities as part of the flood mitigation strategy for river Luznice in the Czech Republic.

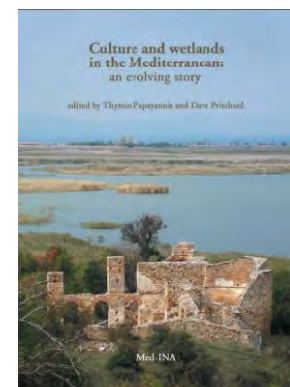
The subsequent discussion in a breakout group focused on how to communicate the value of wetland ecosystem services to decision makers and stakeholders, and concluded:

- ◆ *there are two approaches to focus on ecosystem services: top down (e.g. schemes at Ministry level) and bottom-up – it may be easiest to start focusing on a single service (e.g. a hydrological one),*
- ◆ *focus first on the interests of land owners (“what do wetland services bring to me personally?”) who then put pressure on decision makers,*
- ◆ *decision makers at EU level have realized that there has to be money for nature – so nature has an economic value,*
- ◆ *business wants immediate returns, whereas the benefits of ecosystem services are longer term,*
- ◆ *we need to communicate on the implications of the loss of value, including the beauty of sites (which many people value), but we need also to focus on “what we will win” if we prevent the loss of a service,*
- ◆ *it is necessary to use non-technical language (“say what the values are”),*
- ◆ *develop a better understanding on how ecosystem services relate to the “ecological footprint”,*
- ◆ *integrate ecosystem service thinking into (EU) funding programmes,*
- ◆ *undertaking good valuations (of monetary and non-market values) is time consuming, because it needs to be specific for each local situation.*

Rob McInnes (STRP expert) stressed the need to think of wetlands as water management infrastructures that deliver sustainable sanitation, low cost alternatives (often only 20%) to traditional engineering solutions, plus additional benefits to a range of multiple stakeholders. The conservation sector needs to look at biodiversity as a means to deliver solutions. He stressed the fact that a majority of the human population now lives in urban environments, and that we therefore need to focus particularly on **wetland services in urban environments**. Ramsar has started working to this end together with the United Nations agency for human settlements (UN HABITAT) and the international association of local governments (ICLEI), using urban planning language and wetland ecosystems as providers for urban solutions. Discussions in a breakout group concluded that:

- ◆ *if we do not understand the language of other sectors, how can we expect them to understand our issue,*
- ◆ *green economy and other green initiatives must not lose the language of nature/biodiversity,*
- ◆ *urban green space should not be created at the loss of urban wetlands or urban blue space,*
- ◆ *improving water quality should not impact on natural urban wetlands – we need to focus on restoring or constructing wetlands,*
- ◆ *timing within decision-making processes is crucial – we need to emphasize the issues relating to ecosystem services as early in the process as possible,*
- ◆ *we have to know our ecosystem services better to convince decision-makers and use the correct arguments and information for the appropriate audiences.*

Thymio Papayannis (Culture Working Group) presented progress of work on cultural aspects, values and services in wetlands usefully documented in the new book **“Culture and wetlands in the Mediterranean: an evolving story”**. The substantial publication can be obtained for free from afoutri@med-ina.org. Joint activities are planned with UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre. A new project aims to restore three degraded wetlands in the Mediterranean, using cultural issues to catalyse community involvement. For COP11, the group is preparing six global best practice case studies and a strategic plan for culture and wetlands. Based on a rapid review of cultural wetland services in Azerbaijan, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Serbia and Slovenia, a breakout discussion group draw the following conclusions:



- ◆ *most wetlands in Europe are strongly linked to human activities, i.e. linking culture and nature,*
- ◆ *besides the links of geographical proximity and human water use, other relationships are not well documented, not recognised anymore, or not well understood – and the influences between them are often not properly assessed,*
- ◆ *cultural aspects are invaluable to reconnect people with wetlands and to provide them with motives for conservation,*
- ◆ *besides contributing to human wellbeing, the combination of cultural and natural wetland values can attract visitors and tourists, who in turn may contribute to local economies,*
- ◆ *the Ramsar Convention should promote collaboration between human and natural sciences to produce expertise and guidance for an integrated management approach.*

Ramsar Site symposium and field visit

28 & 29 September 2011

Ramsar Sites – laboratories for sustainable development

The two central days of the Meeting focused on Ramsar Sites (*Wetlands of International Importance*) which provide real-scale laboratories for the Convention to develop innovative and sustainable approaches for environmental management. The participants explored how to use them as a tool for land-use planning in water catchment basins, and how to communicate about this in public. Synergies to be created with other global networks of protected areas were addressed, and ways outlined how to network and cooperate at national scale with public and private partners. During the second day, the participants explored these issues *in situ* in the first **Trilateral Ramsar Site** designated by the Slovak, Czech and Austrian Republics in the floodplains of the Morava-Dyje-Danube confluence. The study tour was guided by *Dušan Vlachovič* (Morava floodplains Ramsar Site), *Miroslava Plassmann* and *Milan Janák* (Daphne Institute of Applied Ecology), *Gerhard Egger* and *Karin Donnerbaum* (WWF Austria), cf. the details provided in the field trip guide. After the visit, the Mayor of Skalica and the Ministry of Environment invited the participants to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the transboundary cooperation in the “Secession”-style cultural house of the town.



Marc Patry (UNESCO World Heritage Centre) provided an overview of the only two other **global networks of protected areas** existing besides the Ramsar Sites (World Heritage Properties and Biosphere Reserves). He briefly addressed the advantages for sites with multiple designations, summarized the ongoing cooperation between UNESCO and Ramsar and outlined possibilities for its future development. *András Schmidt* (Hungarian focal point) and *Arno Mohl* (WWF Austria) then presented the efforts of Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia to conserve and restore habitats in the floodplain ecosystem along the Mura, Drava and Danube rivers and to establish a five-party Transboundary Biosphere Reserve and Ramsar Site, based on the extension of existing Ramsar Sites.

Emmanuel Thiry (national focal point) presented the French wetland action plan as an example for trans-sectoral cooperation between different Ministries, socio-professional sectors, experts, NGOs and stakeholders of the civil society. He highlighted the ecosystem services analysis of the Cotentin and Bessin marshes, wetland management agreements elaborated with the agricultural sector, the preparation of a national strategy on Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) and the newly created **association of French Ramsar Site managers** and its perspectives as a powerful tool for increased Ramsar implementation at national level.

Gerald Plattner (Austrian Federal Forests Ltd.) explained the nature-space-management approach of his **timber company** and its contributions to wetland conservation and restoration. He highlighted the company's programme on peatlands and climate change and the importance of the ecosystem restoration work in the context of Ramsar's theme “forests for water and wetlands” at the occasion of the UN Year of the Forests 2011. He also showed how the programme can be transferred to situations in other countries.

Inspired by these specific aspects of Ramsar Site planning and management, the discussion in plenary underlined the following points:

- ◆ *Ramsar Sites are a unique protected area tool that can easily be adapted to local conditions,*
- ◆ *Ramsar designation adds a global site and catchment basin management perspective beyond biodiversity aspects, notably through the integration of river basin planning with local site management, using Ramsar's "critical path",*
- ◆ *synergies with other planning and land-use instruments (at international, national and EU levels) need to be sought and developed jointly,*
- ◆ *"Ramsar" should be branded visibly to the general public as a quality label for the management of Ramsar Sites and the wise use approach applied for their management,*
- ◆ *more partnerships and joint ventures between the public and private (business) sectors should be developed, based on demonstrated ecosystem services and their particular benefits for each of them.*

Ramsar Sites – how to care for the jewels in the crown

Opening the next session, *Kati Wenzel* (Ramsar Secretariat) focused on practical outcomes for improved wetland management and monitoring through the use of Ramsar tools, such as Advisory Missions, Montreux Record listing and Article 3.2 reporting (cf. DOC. SC43-29). She also provided a detailed overview on the available up-to-date Ramsar Site information and its remaining gaps. Her information was complemented by some practical illustrations: *Vasiliy Kostushyn* (Wetlands International) presented existing information management tools with a particular focus on the Black Sea region, notably the web-based Ramsar Site Information System, waterbird population estimates based on international waterbird and migratory bird censuses, and the critical site network tool, and presented some initial ideas for developing a more comprehensive information system for wetlands and wetland dependent biodiversity. *Bohdan Prots* (WWF-Danube-Carpathian Programme) presented a project to promote the designation of Ramsar Sites in the Carpathian region of Ukraine, based on an inventory of a wide range of biota and a water catchment approach. *Kathrin Weise* (Jena Optronik, Globwetland II project) illustrated the latest progress with wetland monitoring using satellite imagery, and how this is practically used for the management of an increasing number of Ramsar Sites.

Then *David Stroud* (STRP expert for Ramsar Sites) updated the audience about the proposal to streamline the procedure for describing Ramsar Sites at designation and subsequently, in order to respond to fundamental questions such as where Ramsar Sites are, what wetland types and species they contain, why they have been designated, what pressures they face, and which issues have to be solved for their effective management? He introduced the proposed revision of the Ramsar Site information sheet (RIS) and demonstrated a prototype of the new on-line reporting tool (cf. DOC [SC42-19](#), hopefully to be adopted by COP11) during a specific hands-on workshop. He explained that the installation of this web-accessible tool, to be fully operational by the end of 2013, will require a specific project with dedicated voluntary funding. The participants concluded:

- ◆ *that regular updating of baseline Ramsar Site information is an essential tool for site management and the maintenance of ecological character,*
- ◆ *that each Party should therefore provide the Secretariat until March 2012 with updated Ramsar Site information (in time for the finalization of the relevant COP11 document), according to the needs listed in the documents distributed at the Meeting and available on the Web (listing sites with outdated RIS information, Montreux Record and Article 3.2 issues),*
- ◆ *that the proposed on-line reporting tool facilitates Ramsar Site information management, exchange and update, and merits specific voluntary funding for its establishment prior to 2014, and they*
- ◆ *welcomed the practical outcomes of Ramsar Advisory Missions for improved wetland management, notably also of missions not only focusing on one particular Ramsar Site (such as was the case 2009 in Greenland), and encouraged concerned Parties to plan for additional missions and to provide the necessary funds.*

Managing Transboundary Ramsar Sites

András Schmidt introduced the session by stating that Europe is leading with the designation of Transboundary Ramsar Sites and that the time seems right to collect good examples of transboundary cooperation, to mutually exchange experiences, and to identify additional opportunities and remaining challenges in order to help the establishment of further Transboundary Ramsar Sites, also outside of Europe. Six panellists then briefly presented the major characteristics of their transboundary ecosystems and the main rewards and problems they experienced with crossborder work: *Libuse Vlasáková* presented cooperation in the Morava-Dyje-Danube river confluence (Austrian, Czech and Slovak Republics), *Jan-Petter Huberth-Hansen* in the Pasvik boreal forest watershed (Finland, Norway, Russian Federation), *Christian Blum* in the intensively used Upper Rhine floodplain (France, Germany), *Juris Jatnieks* in the wilderness area of the northern Livonian bogs (Estonia, Latvia), *Karin Dubsy* along estuaries and bays shared between Ireland and Northern Ireland (UK), and *Aleksandar Ivanovski* around the Prespa karst mountain lakes (Albania, Greece, TFYR of Macedonia). In the discussion between the panellists and with the audience, it was concluded that:

- ♦ *transboundary cooperation, despite its difficulties and challenges, is essential in areas where administrative borders cut through functioning wetland ecosystems and river catchments,*
- ♦ *transboundary cooperation is a process with different phases that need to be developed over time; often initial cooperation between NGOs triggers the establishment of joint activities and formal agreements between authorities at local, regional and national levels,*
- ♦ *even within the common institutional and legal framework of the European Union, shared by countries with similar economies, administrative approaches, work priorities and implementation methods may differ substantially between neighbours; this makes common planning and the agreement on joint activities a demanding and time-consuming task,*
- ♦ *for wetlands shared by neighbours along the EU/Schengen area outer border, physical cooperation, access to and crossing of the border remains a challenge; however, despite such obstacles, regional projects (e.g. Interreg) to increase awareness and information exchange already substantially advanced crossborder cooperation in such areas,*
- ♦ *despite such difficulties, actors in transboundary cooperation conclude that the results of their work for the maintenance and management of ecosystem services are worth the added efforts to work together in an environment with different languages, cultures and concepts.*



Towards a strategy for the Danube basin and its Ramsar Sites

Goran Gugić (Standing Committee) opened this session focusing on land-use and planning in one of Europe's largest river basins, and how a coherent network of Ramsar Sites therein can contribute to sustainable resource use. He illustrated the situation in the Sava river basin, one of the major Danube tributaries, where unique riparian forests remain in the middle stretches (Lonjsko Polje Ramsar Site). *Olivier Baudelet* (European Commission DG Regio) presented the innovative concept of the **EU Danube region strategy** for territorial cooperation between EU member and non-member states, focusing on water management, navigation,

economical development, tourism and the environment. Operational work under this regional strategy is complementary to existing activities. EU Structural Funds (budget about 100 million EUR, often not fully used) are available for specific projects. Creating and maintaining flood retention areas in river floodplains is a priority particularly interesting for Ramsar.

Raimund Mair (ICPDR) illustrated the **Danube Protection Commission's** work relevant for wetland ecosystems and migratory fish species, with a particular mention of the joint statement on navigation and environmental protection. *Carl Manzano* (Donau-Auen National Park Ramsar Site) presented the **Danubeparks** network of protected areas (Ramsar Sites along the Danube river from Germany to Romania) serving as a platform for know-how transfer, communication on nature tourism and the elaboration of joint transnational strategies. *Orieta Hulea* (WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme) summarized the successes and remaining challenges for the maintenance and restoration of Danube basin wetlands, of which two thirds of their services have been lost. She insisted on the need to develop national action plans for flood adaptation measures and to fully account for environmental resource costs and the values of ecosystem services. The discussion after these complementary presentations focused on a number of crucial points:

- ◆ *the need to overcome contradictions between different EU policies (environment, water management, energy production, navigation) and to elaborate multi-sectoral sustainable solutions,*
- ◆ *the necessity to look for multiple gains by maintaining ecosystem services for tourism (natural and cultural attractions), flood mitigation, water purification, biodiversity conservation and local socio-economic development,*
- ◆ *the lack of attention given so far to sedimentation processes and their alterations through dam constructions, as well as the potential of human-created wetlands to increase river ecosystem dynamics and related services,*
- ◆ *the strategic aim to look first at alternative development options when considering alterations to river floodplains, then to consider mitigation activities, and to plan compensatory measures as a last resort where alternative developments or mitigation interventions are not feasible,*
- ◆ *commending Danubeparks for their concerted actions among Ramsar Site managers along the Danube river and encouraging them to consider including managers from Ramsar Sites along major tributary rivers, and*
- ◆ *noting with concern the need for the assessment of the increasing pressures on the riverine ecosystems stemming from hydropower development and river regulation plans.*



Fit for the Future?

30 September 2011

The final day of the Meeting focused on practical indicators to show how we cope with increasing environmental challenges, if our approaches and methods are still best adapted to find effective solutions, and if we are working sufficiently in synergy with all potential partners who share our interests?

Working at regional level to be more effective – an opportunity or wishful thinking?

Tobias Salathé recalled the purpose of Ramsar regional initiatives established to increase the capacity for better implementation on the ground and stated that there is a need for both political and financial support from all Parties to achieve this (cf. DOC. [SC43-15](#)). Regional initiatives should not duplicate the work of the Secretariat or serve as a regional office for the Convention. He introduced four panel members and invited them to briefly present their lessons learnt so far:



Nejib Benessaiah presented the Mediterranean Wetland Initiative (**MedWet**) which he coordinates. It was the first regional initiative recognized by Ramsar in 1997, including 27 countries, several intergovernmental organisations, Ramsar's International Organisation Partners and different wetland centres. He noted MedWet's ability to collect and transfer knowledge among key stakeholders, the equal voice given to all members, the well established tools developed for inventorying and monitoring wetlands, and the recognition it has brought to the value of cultural heritage in wetlands as well as their natural value. He emphasized the challenges facing MedWet notably the constant need to show members the added value it brings to the region, the need to stay relevant so that member countries continue to support the initiative financially, and the challenge of the ongoing transition from a technical collaborative network to a more politically oriented body. He also announced a major international symposium on water and wetlands to be held in Agadir, Morocco (6-8 February 2012), focusing on



the next twenty years of regional cooperation.



Tiina Nikkonen, the present co-chair of the initiative for the Nordic-Baltic region (**NorBalWet**) with 10 governmental partners, noted that the initiative may expand to include Poland and Germany in the future. Endorsed in 2009, NorBalWet has learned to walk but not yet to communicate well with each other. Its current level of operation is quite limited with a minimum level of resources available, no permanent staff and only limited direct funding as yet. The difficulty of generating and sustaining an income is likely the most important lesson learned. A key challenge is to forget the borders and focus on work that will improve wetland conservation in the partnership area.

Grigore Baboianu introduced **BlackSeaWet** which focuses on the Black and Azov Sea coastal wetlands. While the Initiative was adopted in 2005, its existence and operations were agreed before this date. Its achievements include the development of terms of reference and an agreed action plan, a work plan, budget and the establishment of some national working groups, plus a website in six languages. He suggested that a workshop for the regional initiatives should be organized so that lessons learned can be effectively shared among them.



Ján Kadlecík as coordinator introduced the **Carpathian Wetland Initiative** (CWI) created in 2004 and endorsed by Ramsar in 2009. With seven member countries this initiative works across two conventions, the Ramsar and Carpathian Conventions, which together have signed a Memorandum of Cooperation ([MoC](#)). Yet significant challenges remain: establishing a secretariat to provide structural and operational support, mobilizing other partners (private, NGO etc.), raise the visibility of the initiative and the Ramsar Convention beyond the immediate audience, and develop medium-term planning rather than just an ad hoc annual approach.



Harald Egerer (Interim Secretariat) presented the Carpathian Convention's objective for the protection and sustainable development of the region and noted that while wetland projects are not yet broadly addressed by the convention, they can be in the future. The two conventions have committed to developing a collaborative programme for sustainable wetland and water resource conservation and management.

Following the presentations, three breakout groups looked at the challenges and possible solutions in managing regional initiatives and reported back to the plenary as follows:

- ◆ *the biggest challenges for regional initiatives remain the needs to demonstrate added value in order to motivate at national level, to obtain political implication and commitment and financial support, and to establish transparent and flexible governance structures for the initiatives,*
- ◆ *synergies and cooperation should be created between regional initiatives to disseminate already developed tools, reinforce communication at all levels (in different languages), identify additional financial sources, undertake joint projects and improve cooperation at all levels,*
- ◆ *full participation by all partners (authorities and NGOs, different stakeholders,) in regular meetings and events (at least annually) remains a challenge to create better solidarity and a common feeling of adherence to a joint programme, activities or projects,*
- ◆ *the continuity of the regional cooperation is essential and has to be planned as a long-term need,*
- ◆ *further development of regional training and capacity-building centres (focusing on traditional and innovative values) is promising, and*
- ◆ *raising Ramsar visibility among the general public and making optimal use of Ramsar tools, are two areas of activities that need to be developed and expanded.*

Issues and priorities for the future scientific and technical work of the Convention

Nick Davidson presented an overview of the current work of Ramsar's scientific and technical review panel (STRP) focusing on 51 globally relevant tasks with top priorities being: wetland services in the water cycle and for biodiversity, agriculture, and the economics of wetland ecosystems and biodiversity (cf. DOC. SC43-19). He invited the audience to comment on tasks and priorities, to identify any additional tasks to be addressed during the coming triennium, and to help identify funding sources for the work to be undertaken, inviting Parties to indicate their willingness to support work on specific themes or tasks, e.g. through hosting specific workshops, supporting necessary studies or leading particular processes. Two breakout groups discussed these issues and reported back that Parties:

- ◆ *would like to have a clearer picture of the nature of the work by STRP members and contracted experts, insisting that STRP products should be easily accessible to wetland managers and national focal points, and be produced in a user-friendly language (style and translations),*
- ◆ *ask for a better share of information, especially of best practice and case studies, using electronic and paper formats for dissemination,*
- ◆ *ask for short briefing notes targeted to the interests of specific audiences (on-site managers, decision makers, communications staff, etc.), while considering that mega-reports are less useful to reach busy people (which we all are),*
- ◆ *underline the principle that priority should be given to completing tasks already 'in hand' and to avoid wasting investment in new issues with unknown outcomes,*
- ◆ *insist on the need to improve (two-way) linkages between regional initiatives and the work of STRP,*
- ◆ *feel that face-to-face meetings, such as the regional STRP national focal point meetings held in Austria (2007) and South Africa (2011) were particularly helpful,*
- ◆ *consider that the list of priority tasks presented seems about right, but ranked particularly high the need to work on climate change (collaboratively with other institutions to remain politically and financially relevant), economics of ecosystem services, wetland inventory and Ramsar Site information management,*
- ◆ *ask STRP to explore co-financing opportunities (EU, UNESCO, development agencies, research foundations and others) for work of common interest and joint ventures, and to refine their fund-raising package,*
- ◆ *request process support for better networking at regional level, expressing the need for more social science-type expertise and work on how communities benefit from wetlands, and its implications for managing change.*

How is the Ramsar Convention working in my country?



Sandra Hails (Ramsar Secretariat) presented a brief overview of the roles of national focal points (for administration, CEPA & STRP) in-country and the potential benefits of their work and interactions. Her analysis shows that European countries are lacking behind in designating and benefiting from the work of such focal points in comparison to other regions. Her presentation led to an interactive workshop to discuss and clarify in more detail how the convention is implemented at national level, and how the different focal points (governmental and NGO) interact with each other and with National Ramsar Committees where such exist (cf. also the [latest analysis](#)). This helped to

identify challenges to implement the convention at national level, and to reflect on the reasons why there are significant differences between Europe and the global situation. The results of the workshop questionnaire show the following:

- ◆ *three Ramsar focal points out of four can only spend a limited part of their time (<24%) for Ramsar matters (and split it equally between focusing on Ramsar Sites and wetland wise use), and nearly all consider that they do not have enough time to devote to Ramsar matters,*
- ◆ *the NGO representatives consider unanimously that the Ramsar administrative authorities do not have sufficient capacity (time and resources) to implement Ramsar,*
- ◆ *less than one country out of five benefits from the existence of a National Ramsar Committee to coordinate wetland matters at national level, and more than a third of the respondents feel that Ramsar matters are not really coordinated in their country,*
- ◆ *in many cases three different Ramsar focal point positions (administrative authority for general matters, for scientific and technical, and for CEPA matters) are filled by the same administrative person, the main reasons for this situation—resulting in a serious capacity limitation—are a lack of people, lack of political will, and a lack of interest,*
- ◆ *overall the respondents (n=50) consider that the main limitations for Ramsar implementation in their country to be the low relevance given to Ramsar in the face of EU priorities, a lack of political will, funding and time, and a lack of visibility of Ramsar at national level.*

Wetland wilderness – great tourist destinations

Michael Meyer (UN World Tourism Organisation consulting unit) explained the strong commitment of the seven Carpathian Convention Parties to improve tourism development management and monitoring as the reason for the preparation of a specific protocol as a basis for a Carpathian tourism strategy and national regulations, in line with the Alpine Convention. Several components of the protocol are relevant for Ramsar and could easily be included into the draft resolution for COP11 ([SC43-27](#)): the integration of objectives of sustainable tourism into sectoral policies, including water (article 5), management of environmental impacts of tourism, especially on water resources (article 22), monitoring the effectiveness of policies and strategies, including the protection and sustainable use of water resources (article 24). The priority is now to enforce the protocol, elaborate the Carpathian tourism strategy, and to communicate success stories to the region.



Sandra Hails then gave an overview of the issues to be covered by the global **World Wetlands Day 2012** campaign and the COP11 theme and the communication products in preparation by the Secretariat. UNWTO definitions of sustainable tourism and ecotourism are provided to set a framework for managing tourism in an around wetlands. The draft resolution identifies opportunities as well as direct and indirect threats of tourism to wetlands. It addresses issues for consideration by a broad range of stakeholders: national and regional wetland policy makers, wetland site managers, tourism economic sectors and operators. A booklet based on 14 case studies across the world is in preparation for COP11. She invited Parties to:

- ♦ *take up the theme on “wetlands, tourism and recreation” for World Wetlands Day and COP11 in 2012 and to prepare appropriate outreach events, seminars, outdoor activities, etc. in order to engage a wide public and to identify tourism opportunities for long-term wetland management and local sustainable socio-economic development.*

Outlook from Trnava to Bucharest – priorities for the coming months

Tobias Salathé commented on the budget proposals, and that financing is becoming an increasing challenge. While this Meeting profited from generous donations by a number of Parties, voluntary funding for COP11-related costs, including delegate support, is not yet very advanced. Besides assuring the necessary finances for the Secretariat in the short and medium term, specific pledges for voluntary funding for aspects of STRP-related work will be forthcoming. He **thanked** the Slovak hosts, the participants, and in particular all speakers, moderators and facilitators of breakout and working groups (for their names cf. the agenda) for their input and feedback provided, and the authors of the photographs included in this report (N. Alexeeva, R. Cerkvénik, N. Davidson, Slovak Nature Conservancy), and reiterated that the wetlands and tourism theme is catching attention and speaking to many people, as it is very tangible in socio-economic terms. He invited the Parties to study the COP11 documents well ahead of the global meeting and invited all to the next European meeting before the opening of COP11 in Bucharest. *Denis Landenbergue* (WWF International) made a strong plea that—already prior to COP—Standing Committee looks into how to make Ramsar funding more stable and reliable.

Gerhard Schwach summarised his impressions and conclusions of the substantial Meeting with more than 50 presentations. He felt that regional meetings provide excellent opportunities for exchange of views, enhancing communication and learning from each other. Wetlands are becoming increasingly relevant in the water sector: the UNECE Water Convention and the Danube Protection Convention are now addressing wetland related issues. He stressed the need to better use synergies between different international environmental agreements and programmes (e.g. with UNESCO in view of the proposed five-country Biosphere Reserve along the Danube). Synergies between forest and wetland management should be developed further (e.g. with private and public timber companies). He noted progress in managing regional Ramsar initiatives, but also that some lack capacity, staff and funding. He was pleased with the good progress with Transboundary Ramsar Sites – and noted that it is crucial to involve local stakeholder and NGOs, to have formal agreements, hold regular meetings, and enliven them with field projects. The European Union provides many funding opportunities, but these are not being used as well as could be. There exists huge expertise how to obtain such funding, and this can help newcomers. He hopes that Ramsar guidance elaborated by STRP will focus more on the socio-economic side of the issues, while agreeing on the top priorities being Ramsar Site information management (RIS), wetland economics, climate change (asking the right questions), and wetland inventory. The EU demands make it hard to brand and increase the attention to Ramsar, but this still needs to be pursued, e.g. through a novative approach such as the new French Ramsar managers’ association. He further noted that we need to make increased efforts to involve the private sector, and to develop a wider understanding about CEPA issues, and their usefulness for outreach. These are the issues to be kept in mind when considering COP11 draft resolutions.

Jan-Petter Hubert-Hansen reflected that European Meetings provide a very different atmosphere from COPs and help Parties to organise and prepare themselves for the latter. Allowing us to know each other better is very helpful for the negotiations during the COP. He suggested that it is valuable to have a first opportunity to look in more detail into the draft resolutions during regional meetings prior to COP. He felt that it would be good to have an evaluation of the progress—or lack of it—with Ramsar Site designation and updating, and of increasing cooperation with partners such as the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme and the Carpathian Convention. He welcomed the focus on wetlands and tourism for 2012 and stressed the need to continue to give focus on Ramsar Sites, along with the broader wetland issues. He underlined the promising progress of the regional initiatives and thanked the local and Ramsar Secretariat organizers.

Then, *Jana Durkošová*, of the Slovak Ministry of Environment, closed the Meeting.

- ♦ *The next meeting of the European Parties will take place prior to the opening of COP11 in Bucharest, Romania, to take stock of progress with Ramsar implementation, based on the National Reports, and to prepare for the negotiations during COP11.*