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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

National Workshop on Invasive Alien Species in Bulgaria

Sofia, 20-21 October 2008

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REPORT

*Document
prepared by
the Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage*

The Standing Committee is invited to:

1. take note of the report of the national workshop;
2. thank the Bulgarian authorities for the excellent hosting and organisation of the workshop.

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1. Welcome and Introduction

Mr. Atanas Kostadinov, Deputy Minister of Environment and Water of Bulgaria welcomed participants and thanked the workshop organisers and the co-operation with the Council of Europe. He highlighted the importance of addressing the issue of invasive alien species (IAS) and their increase in number and effects due to their rapid spread through transport, trade, etc. Mr. Kostadinov stressed the impact of IAS on biodiversity and human health and the need to take regulatory and control measures, in compliance with EU policies. The Deputy Minister underlined the importance of prevention and early action as most cost-effective measures to deal with IAS, and welcomed the opportunity to discuss this issue with European experts during the workshop. He further informed that a national strategy on IAS is under development, in line with the EU's Biodiversity Action Plan. Mr. Kostadinov formally declared the workshop open and wished participants a successful meeting.

Ms Carolina Lasén Díaz, from the Bern Convention Secretariat at the Council of Europe, thanked the Bulgarian hosts and told participants that this was the fourth national workshop on IAS under the Bern Convention. She presented the following objectives of the workshop: to help and support national dialogue in Bulgaria to develop a policy on IAS; to share information and experience on IAS issues among European countries; to improve co-ordination and communication among the different relevant sectors and institutions working on this issue in Bulgaria; and to agree on a number of conclusions and recommendations for the future regarding the development of a national strategy on IAS. She put the workshop in the context of implementing Article 11(2)(b) of the Bern Convention, as well as the European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species, endorsed by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention in 2003.

Mrs Raina Hardalova, Head of the Biodiversity Division at the Ministry of Environment and Water, stated that IAS is a priority both for the Bern Convention and the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water, as IAS are a serious threat in Bulgaria. She added that increased funding and co-ordination are needed to cope with this problem. Mrs Hardalova stressed that this workshop should help create a network of experts in Bulgaria, as well as clarify the main priorities to move this issue forward.

Workshop participants introduced themselves, highlighting their current roles and positions and their expectations from the workshop.

2. Adoption of Agenda

The workshop was chaired by Mrs Raina Hardalova.

The agenda of the workshop was adopted as it appears in Appendix 2.

3. Session 1: Background and introduction to invasive alien species

A number of presentations were given by experts brought by the Council of Europe and including members of the Bern Convention's Group of Experts on IAS. The issues covered ranged from a general introduction to key definitions, threats and actions related to IAS; the CBD framework on IAS; the European Strategy on IAS adopted under the Bern Convention; developments of EU policy on this issue; and invasive plant species in Europe.

Some of the key issues raised were: the problems of terminology related to IAS; different practical tools to access and exchange information on IAS, such as the NOBANIS network (the North European and Baltic Network on Invasive Alien Species); the EU ALARM project (Assessing Large-scale Environmental Risks to Biodiversity with Tested Methods); the DAISIE network (Delivering Alien Invasive Species Inventories for Europe); GISIN (the Global Invasive Species Information Network); and the NEOBIOTA international conferences on Biological Invasions. The Bulgarian institutions participating in the workshop were invited to join the NOBANIS network as a way to improve access to information on IAS and exchange with other countries. Plans by the European Environment Agency to develop an early warning and information system on IAS in Europe were also discussed.

The work of several international organisations was also referred to as crucial to tackle IAS, such as the international convention for the control and management of ships' ballast water adopted by the

International Maritime Organisation in 2004, the international plant protection convention, the world organisation for animal health, and IUCN's Invasive Species Specialist Group.

Following the presentations, participants discussed protected species as IAS; the lack of information available on the presence of IAS in Bulgaria and their interaction with local species; and one of the main problems identified: the lack of awareness about IAS in Bulgaria, especially regarding the agricultural sector and the horticulture industry. Workshop participants emphasised the importance of not only having a good legal framework, but also of adequate enforcement measures.

4. Session 2: IAS in Bulgaria

The situation concerning Bulgaria's biodiversity and the threats and impact it faces from IAS were presented to workshop participants. This session included detailed presentations on specific species and ecosystems, such as invasive alien plants, alien arthropods, freshwater and marine IAS in the Black Sea.

Some issues raised during this session were as follows: the need to carry out an assessment/inventory of invasive alien plants in Bulgaria and their negative impact on local species of plants and fungi; the need to prioritise species to address potential invasives and non-invasives in Bulgaria; access to databases, blacklists and action plans; guidance for management and control of IAS; pilot projects to focus on the most invasive and problematic species; the role of regional networks such as NOBANIS; how to increase public awareness; research projects on IAS in Bulgaria; and the need to clarify the terminology used on IAS issues.

Some of the recommendations discussed included the need to set up a working group to help develop the national strategy on IAS; the need for a specific website on IAS in Bulgaria; the setting up of a monitoring system for IAS with an environmental impact, similar to the one for quarantine carried out by the national service for plant protection; the need for preventive measures across the education, research, management and governmental sectors; and the need to translate scientific knowledge to the public.

5. Session 3: National IAS policy in Bulgaria

This session provided an overview of European experience IAS legislation and policy, covering the development of an IAS framework in the EU, country experiences, and indicators to strengthen national policies on IAS, including a roadmap for the development of national strategy and the need to bring different stakeholders and expertise together. Common problems encountered at the national level are: the lack of political and public awareness; inadequate national capacity; a fragmented legislative, policy and institutional approach; gaps in coverage and terminology; and a low level of engagement, compliance and enforcement. Some measures that would help redress that situation would be increased leadership and coordination; focal points in all relevant departments; adequate funding; and national structures to cover prevention, control and eradication of IAS.

The example of Poland's experience in dealing with IAS was presented to illustrate some of the difficulties and challenges encountered at the national level, even though a positive trend can be identified in the last ten years. There are close to 1000 known IAS in Poland, where a black book of alien animals is under preparation, even though no specific IAS strategy is envisaged. A sectoral approach dominates this issue, with the plant and animal protection systems being the best developed, and other provisions affecting IAS found in the hunting legislation. A presentation on dealing with invasive alien plants in Slovenia was added to the agenda, showing that three quarters of invasive alien plants in Slovenia are introduced for ornamental reasons.

Regarding the legislation in Bulgaria, a country which is Party to the main international conventions and participates on relevant organisations dealing with this issue, two critical issues are the existing gaps concerning trade measures, as well as the problem to implement non-legally binding tools such as international recommendations and strategies. There is an authorisation procedure for IAS, which involves the advice of the National Biodiversity Council, taking account of the assessment of the species for introduction into the wild or their breeding in controlled conditions. There are also specific laws on fisheries and aquaculture, and plant protection, which can be applied to IAS issues, similarly to the sectoral approach followed in Poland and many other countries. It is legally possible to

ban certain species from import but these provisions have not yet been used in practice. IAS are monitored in protected areas, including Natura 2000 sites, but the most affected areas are difficult to control as these are the Danube river and the Black Sea coast. Key challenges for Bulgaria remain the need to increase public awareness on IAS; to increase capacity; to complete their legal framework; to take special measures for species with a negative economic impact; and to develop a strategic document on this issue.

6. Session 4: Working group session on possible components of a national strategy on invasive alien species

Workshop participants were divided into three working groups and asked to discuss the following questions:

- What are the main country needs and priorities to deal with IAS?
- How to deal with those key needs and priorities?
- What should be the next steps after this workshop?
- How to build regional and sub-regional cooperation?

The three working groups reported the results of their discussions to the plenary group, identifying main gaps, needs and priorities to make progress on IAS-related issues in Bulgaria. On the basis of those discussions, workshop participants agreed a set of conclusions and recommendations for action (Appendix 1).

7. Closing

Workshop organisers thanked participants for their hard work and active engagement during the two-day meeting, as well as the contributions made by foreign experts, and the high quality work carried out by the two interpreters.

Appendix 1

Proposals from the participants at the National Workshop on Invasive Alien Species in Bulgaria, held in Sofia on 20-21 October 2008:

1. To develop a National Strategy on IAS: A general document with a long-term perspective and including: a legislative review, the competent authorities involved and their responsibilities, and activities to be undertaken. The National Strategy should also include an action plan with the institutional and financial frameworks, and have a focus on prevention and mitigation of impacts of IAS. The Strategy should include consideration of changes needed in the legislation concerning the key sectors for IAS: the Forestry Act, the Hunting Act, and the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act.
2. To establish a database of all alien species in Bulgaria, including invasive and non-invasive species. This database should include information on how to recognize IAS, including fact-sheets, and be linked to existing databases in Europe. The database should also include information on the IAS which present a higher risk to nature as well as information on species distribution, habitats impacted, and source of the introduction. This database should be available in Bulgarian and English, and accessible through the internet and published in the Clearing House Mechanism (on-line access).
3. To make a list of the top ten worst invasive species in Bulgaria: including those species with the most negative economic and environmental impact in the country, and to develop urgent measures and action plans for these species, including monitoring, project development and funding, without waiting for the finalisation of the National Strategy.
4. To urgently create a black list for IAS whose introduction should be forbidden, and linked to legislation.
5. To establish a list of species not to be used when dealing with forestry, fisheries, horticulture or erosion. These practices should be controlled at the regional or municipal level to limit the distribution of IAS. The use of substitute native species should be encouraged.
6. To make a list with the top ten most valuable and vulnerable habitats in Bulgaria, from a national and international perspective, and to develop special measures and concrete proposals to prevent and reduce the impact of IAS on these endangered habitats. This should be part of an inventory of habitat-specific work to enrich the database and address the impacts of IAS.
7. To establish an on-line register of experts, including regional experts.
8. To set up a coordinating unit/working group at the Ministry for Environment and Water, to be a focal point for the activities and projects linked to IAS, and which should include representatives of national and local authorities, scientists, NGOs, and the private sector.
9. To increase the capacity of government officials to deal with IAS issues, including State and regional administration responsible for nature protection.
10. To carry out pilot projects for priority IAS in order to mitigate their impact, funded through the National Environment Programme.
11. To involve the country's scientific capacity to assess risks, impacts on ecosystems and socio-economic effects of IAS.
12. To carry out an extensive awareness-raising and education campaign, including media, NGO and private sector involvement. This should include the production of brochures, posters, publications, etc. to inform the public about IAS and how to recognise them, as well as their economic and environmental impacts, in order to reduce the practices linked to the introduction of IAS. Good practices on handling IAS in Bulgaria and abroad should also be disseminated. It is also critical to target teachers, children and young people in this campaign.

13. To increase regional co-operation in the Balkans and Black Sea regions on IAS issues, under the framework of the Bern Convention, but also take part in the Biodiversity Working Group of the Black Sea Commission and cooperate in the Danube, as it is the main source of IAS in Bulgaria, through collaboration with the Secretariat of the International Commission on the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). Further cooperation on IAS should be promoted within the operational programmes with Greece and Romania, and including in the cross-border Natura 2000 sites.

Appendix 2



BIODIVERSITY DIVISION, MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND WATER,
BULGARIA

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Workshop on
Invasive Alien Species in Bulgaria**

“St. Sofia” Hotel, 18 Pirotska Str., Sofia
20-21 October 2008

Programme



National Workshop on Invasive Alien Species in Bulgaria

Sofia, 20-21 October 2008

Monday, 20 October 2008

- 9:30 – 10:00 Registration
- 10:00 – 11:00 Welcome by Mr. Atanas Kostadinov, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment and Water of Bulgaria
- Workshop introduction and objectives
- Participants presentation
- 11:00 – 11:15 Coffee break

11:15 – 12:30 SESSION 1: Background and introduction to invasive alien species

- General introduction to IAS: Key definitions, threats and actions (Mr Wojciech Solarz, Institute of Nature Conservation, Polish Academy of Sciences)
- IAS in Europe: The Bern Convention European Strategy on IAS and progress towards an EU framework on IAS (Ms Clare Shine, Associate of the Institute for European Environmental Policy)
- Invasive plant species in Europe (Nejc Jogan, University of Ljubljana)

Discussion

- 12:30 – 14:00 Lunch break

14:00 – 17:30 SESSION 2: IAS in Bulgaria

- IAS Plants review (Mr. Vladimir Vladimirov, Institute of Botany, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)
- IAS – Experience of the National Museum of Natural History, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Dr. Nikolay Simov, National Museum of Natural History, BAS)
- IAS – Experience of the Central Laboratory of General Ecology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Dr. Boyko Georgiev, Central Laboratory of General Ecology, BAS)
- Invasive invertebrates: A review of Alien Artropods of Bulgaria, (Dr. Rumen Tomov, University of Forestry, Sofia)
- IAS in the Black Sea (Dr. Elitssa Petrova, Institute of Fishing Resources, Varna)
- Invasive Fresh Water Molluscs and Fish Species in Bulgaria (Dr. Teodora Trichkova, Institute of Zoology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

Discussion

Tuesday, 21 October 2008

9:00 – 10:45 SESSION 3: National IAS policy in Bulgaria

- Overview of European experience in national IAS legislation and policy (Ms Clare Shine)

- Solving IAS problems in Poland? (Mr Wojciech Solarz, Institute of Nature Conservation, Polish Academy of Sciences)
- Invasive plants in Slovenia (Nejc Jogan, University of Ljubljana)
- Analysis of IAS legislation in Bulgaria (Ms Raina Hardalova, Ministry of Environment and Water)

Discussion

10:45 – 11:00 Coffee break

11:00 – 13:00 SESSION 4: Working groups session

Workshop participants will be divided into working groups and asked to discuss and answer the following questions:

- What are the main country needs and priorities to deal with IAS in Bulgaria?
- How should we deal with those key needs and priorities?
- What should be the next steps after this workshop?
- How should regional and sub-regional cooperation on IAS be built?

Discussion

13:00 - 14:30 Lunch break

14:30 – 16:00 SESSION 5: The way forward

- Next steps: Follow-up actions
- Workshop conclusions

Closing

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