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Public benefit report on activities in 2008

The mission of CEEweb for Biodiversity is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development. Registered in 1994, it is now a network of 76 members from 18 countries, who actively work in the CEE region. While covering a broad range of European and regional policies in pursuing its mission, the members of CEEweb especially focus on four thematic areas within the Working Groups (WGs): CITES, Natura 2000, Rural Development and Sustainable Tourism. In addition the Policy Working Group was established in 2007 for developing horizontal policy responses to tackle the root causes of biodiversity loss. The work of the network is guided by the Board comprising three members, and the International Advisory Committee comprising three members as well as the WG Chairs.

This present report only covers the regionally coordinated activities of the network, and not the various actions of the members. More information about the activities can be found at www.ceeweb.org.

The most important results in 2008

Establishment of the Policy Working Group

First of all the activities of CEEweb aimed at integrating and enhancing environmental considerations in policy and decision making mainly at EU, but also at regional and national, as well as at local levels within pilot activities. The CEEweb Annual Meeting in 2007 made a very important step towards proactivity in CEEweb's policy making and strategic work with the establishment of the CEEweb Policy Working Group (PWG). Its mandate is to develop policy responses to the various drivers of biodiversity loss, which are then channelled also into the various consultation processes through the Policy Office and the thematic WGs. The WG had three meetings in Budapest in April, August and November.

Providing input into the post 2010 biodiversity policy discussions

In 2008 consultations started on the post 2010 EU and global biodiversity policies among NGOs and policy makers. CEEweb participated in the consultations within the European Habitats Forum and its Core Group, which CEEweb joined in 2008. With the involvement of the Policy Working Group an assessment of the EU Biodiversity Action Plan and its implementation started in November and finished in early 2009.

Supporting Pan-European cooperation for biodiversity conservation

CEEweb is coordinating the preparation of biodiversity country profiles in Pan-European countries. The aim of this activity is to assess the situation of nature conservation and progress in the implementation of the Kyiv targets, as well as to identify the main challenges in the region. The outcomes will be channelled into the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS) process for strengthening Pan-European cooperation. Besides, a printed publication on biodiversity and ecosystem services was prepared entitled: *Why Does Biodiversity Loss Matter? Answers for Ministers and Children* in English and Russian.

Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic

This initiative was proposed by CEEweb and launched at the Belgrade conference in 2007. Its aim is to raise political and public awareness on biodiversity through regular national picnics on International Biodiversity Day. This year the first Pan-European biodiversity picnics took place in Azerbaijan; at CBD COP9, Germany; and Moldova under the coordination of CEEweb. Besides, it was also organised by the Ministry of Environment in Luxemburg.

Training for trainers on CITES

The CITES WG organised a train the trainers workshop in April in order to increase the knowledge of WG members on CITES and EU Wildlife Trade Regulations. The workshop consisted of presentations and documental movies on one hand, and practical exercises with different types of documents and samples of CITES specimens for recognition on the other.

CEE exhibition on CITES

Within a regional campaign the CITES WG is carrying out an international exhibition on CITES and EU Wildlife Trade Regulations in eight CEE countries. The campaign materials are exhibited for six months in four countries (Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) and then will be transported to other countries (Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Ukraine) for the following half year.

Natura 2000 Working Group

CEEweb members continued the cooperation within the Natura 2000 WG in various activity fields. They represent regional concerns related to Natura 2000 in the work of Brussels based NGO networks and coalitions and at international conferences and workshops. For building the capacities of the members, in September a half-day training on the European Environmental Liability Directive was organized to familiarize WG members with this legal tool.

Natura 2000 designation

CEEweb continued to coordinate the NGO input in Natura 2000 designation in the new MSs. A joint preparatory meeting for the Biogeographic Seminar for Romanian and Bulgarian NGOs was organized in May. CEEweb has successfully lobbied at the European Commission for stronger NGO representation in the Seminar and supported the lobby activities of national NGO coalitions. In June, CEEweb members made a major contribution to an unbiased and scientifically correct site designation through technical input into the Biogeographic Seminars on behalf of the European Habitats Forum (EHF).

Besides, CEEweb played an important role with other NGOs in lobbying for stronger protection of Bulgarian Natura 2000 sites and supported the new Polish government's first steps to correct Natura 2000 designation.

Lobbying for better Natura 2000 implementation

CEEweb organized different lobby meetings to raise Natura 2000 related issues which are of regional importance. In January we met the Commission's Infringement Unit in Brussels to discuss the complaints started and under preparation. In September the Working Group met Ladislav Miko, Director of the 'Nature Directorate' of DG Environment, for an informal bilateral meeting, where different aspects of Natura 2000 implementation and other biodiversity issues were discussed. An important input to this work was provided through the update and completion of Natura 2000 fact sheets in the new MSs. Besides, there was input provided on the governmental decree on Natura 2000, as well as the law on forests in relation to Natura 2000 in Hungary.

Forums on Natura 2000 for Hungarian stakeholders

CEEweb organised three forums on Natura 2000 for Hungarian stakeholders in the first months of 2008: on Natura 2000 and forests mainly targeting National Parks; on discussing legal cases related to Natura 2000 implementation; and in collaboration with MME – BirdLife Hungary a forum about transport infrastructure and Natura 2000.

EU enlargement, biodiversity and rural development

A seminar was organised for accession country NGOs in the Western Balkans. The aim of the event was to look at the general EU context of sustainability and share the experiences how the accession influenced biodiversity and rural development in the new member states. Moreover, the current situation in the Balkan countries was discussed and opportunity was provided to share experiences and good practices between EU and the accession countries.

CEE Military Training Areas project

This project started in late 2006 and has focused so far on data collection. The cooperation and joint work with German Foundation Naturstiftung David has continued and is envisaged to last at least until 2010. An internet portal with information and database, which will be accessible for the public, is near completion now. Interested members of the Natura 2000 WG met in March in the Czech Republic and a major conference with the involvement of CEE ministries of environment, ministries of defence and NGOs is organised in December. A publication focusing on the Visegrád countries has been prepared as well.

Rural Development Working Group

The cooperation within the Rural Development Working Group (RDWG) was strengthened in 2008 focusing on some specific issues. In order to recruit new members to the RDWG three site visits were organized in the Czech Republic. In late summer the RDWG also started to prepare a project about transferring experiences to the Western Balkans, and an international forum on Leader programme and direct marketing was organised in November.

In 2008 CEEweb also actively participated in the work of EEB Agricultural WG and related events.

Participating in the CAP Health Check process

In January, the RDWG compiled and sent a position paper to the European Commission within the public consultation process on the CAP Health Check. Afterwards CEEweb attended an international conference on the future of the CAP and also a European workshop on the agricultural practices and the conservation of arable lands to represent regional concerns.

National Rural Development Plans

Assessments of the National Rural Development Plans were carried out by RDWG members in CEE countries based on a questionnaire. After evaluating the results, a lobby meeting was organized in Brussels at DG Agriculture to establish working contacts with the Commission and to discuss specific problems, which were revealed by the assessments.

CEEweb Academy on biomass

CEEweb organized a CEEweb Academy on biomass in May with the aim to disseminate information, share experiences and to investigate why biofuels cannot bring a solution to the problem of global warming and energy shortage. Besides CEEweb and the Hungarian National Society of Conservationists prepared a publication entitled the "Biomass Dilemma", which explains the real social, economic and environmental implications of biomass including agrofuels.

Sustainable Tourism Working Group (STWG)

The capacity-building of STWG members continued and a workshop focusing on tourism related European policies was held back-to-back with the STWG meeting in Bulgaria on October 9-13. Among others the participants discussed how CEEweb should foster sustainable tourism development on policy level.

Drafting the tourism protocol to the Carpathian Convention

Within the INTERREG IIIB CADSES Carpathian Project CEEweb and Ecological Tourism in Europe coordinated the drafting of a tourism protocol under the Carpathian Convention. CEEweb organized the 2nd Meeting of Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Tourism, where the draft protocol was finalised and recommendations were developed for submission to the COP2 meeting in July. Besides, participants shared information, project ideas and agreed on further cooperation at the meeting.

Cultural heritage under the Carpathian Convention

Together with one of its Hungarian member organizations, Green Action, CEEweb organized a forum "*For the conservation of cultural heritage in the Carpathians*" for Hungarian stakeholders in March. The aim of the event was to analyse how the Carpathian Convention can enhance the protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Local Agenda 21

Within the INTERREG IIIB CADSES Carpathian Project a methodology for Local Agenda 21 implementation in Carpathian settlements was developed using the results of a pilot project in Kralova Lehota, Slovakia. The methodology was published in a manual "*How Local Agenda 21 can change your community: A manual for Carpathian settlements*" in English and Slovakian. Linked to this activity, a Hungarian manual on Local Agenda 21 was prepared and a workshop on LA21 was organised in March in Miskolc, Hungary.

Business and Biodiversity

CEEweb organized a conference, "Linking Business and Biodiversity" for Hungarian stakeholders in February. Participants listened to presentations about national and EU experience, ongoing and well-working projects and could also share information, best-practices and lessons learned.

Climate change and biodiversity

CEEweb completed a questionnaire with its members in order to assess how much biodiversity and sustainability considerations are taken into account in CEE governments' climate change strategies. The results are channelled into the EU policy processes, among others the EU policy discussion on climate change adaptation.

National Capacity Self-Assessment of the implementation of the Rio Conventions in Hungary

This project aimed to identify the available capacities and capacity constraints for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Desertification with wide stakeholder involvement in Hungary. Based on the findings recommendations for capacity development were formulated at systemic, institutional and individual levels. The final report was prepared in 2008, which would be discussed by the National Council on Sustainable Development of Hungary in 2009.

Capacity-building, networking and communication

In order to build a stronger and more active CEEweb network, the Policy Office has made continued efforts in the field of networking, capacity-building and communication.

- Within this framework the CEEweb Policy Office is making efforts to activate the sleeping members of its network through seeking out them on e-mail or by phone, and also through collecting answers of a motivation questionnaire.
- Site visits for existing and potential members were made in Hungary and Czech Republic in January and March.
- CEEweb prepared its first draft Communication Plan for the Annual Meeting in order to strengthen the information sharing within the network and with its external target groups, and in order to strengthen the cooperation with the media.
- A one-day workshop on policy paper writing skills and working with the media was organized for CEEweb members in May and October respectively in order to improve their skills in these fields.
- The system of Networking Focal Points was established in order to facilitate the networking tasks more easily.
- Project management training was held for the office staff, WG chairs and networking focal points in December.
- Press releases were distributed on hot topics, like the relationships between the financial and ecological crisis and the mid-term review of the EU Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Our magazine entitled "*Diversity*" was published twice in 2008 focusing on actual policy developments, members' activities and CEEweb positions among others.
- BUILDING ON VALUES - PROTECTING THE FUTURE, the Biennial Report of CEEweb for Biodiversity contains CEEweb values and much of the activities the network undertook in the past two years.
- The Policy office team was enlarged with a new position of a financial manager from autumn.
- The lobbying capacity of CEEweb was enlarged with the help of a liaison officer based in Brussels and a policy expert based in Belgium during autumn.
- The internship programme continued in 2008 with the involvement of one intern during spring-summer and one during autumn. Both interns joined the Policy Office working in the fields of sustainable tourism and Natura 2000.

CEEweb for Biodiversity is a network of non-governmental organizations in the Central and Eastern European region. Our mission is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development.