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Conservation of Natural Heritage of Visegrad Countries Through Saving Biodiversity In The Landscape – Kick-off meeting

The International Visegrad Fund Kick-off meeting on the 'Conservation of natural heritage of Visegrad countries through saving biodiversity in the landscape' **took place in July 6, 2011, Gömöraszólós, Hungary** with eleven participants from NGOs of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland. The meeting served the aim to allow the project partners to get familiar with the exact details of the project, to define more precisely the aim, scope and steps of the project, to discuss national situation in terms of green infrastructure and to agree on the methodology of a study that forms the base of further recommendations for various policies.

The meeting started with the presentation on the International Visegrad Fund and the introduction of the project, where the background, the objectives, the tools and the expected results of the project were demonstrated.

Since Europe is one of the most densely populated continent with largely growing artificial areas (since 2000 3.4% increase) and 30% highly fragmented lands, biodiversity faces a massive challenge in the form of land use change and habitat loss. This fact was acknowledged by the decision-makers, as well, which induced the on-going discussion on a new strategy on green infrastructure at an EU level. This strategy will consist of a structure of certain elements, including, protected areas, Natura 2000 sites, rivers, wetlands, floodplains, forests, extensive agricultural areas, parks, biodiversity-rich urban areas, artificial elements (e.g. ecobridges), etc. which will serve to enhance ecosystems' resilience and sustain their major services (e.g. food, raw material, pollination, flood mitigation, climate regulation, etc.), while also achieving biodiversity conservation objectives and enabling societies to adapt to climate change. In order to achieve the implementation of such a strategy, it is necessary for us to be aware of the characteristics and status of the Visegrad countries' green infrastructure elements, how they are integrated into national legislation and strategies, how these strategies are *de facto* applied and what amendments are needed. Therefore, the main aspect of the project is to reveal the national situation of the Visegrad countries in terms of green infrastructure through an overall study, and based on it, to work out recommendations for the national level and draw conclusions for the EU level, as well. Also, the results' publication and dissemination in forms of newsletters, press releases, the website and an electronic postcard to emphasise the importance of green infrastructure will also formulate the fundamental task of this Visegrad project. As a results, a thorough analysis on the region's status, a well worked-out methodology on data collection, a successful way of dissemination and awareness raising are expected along with the strengthened co-operation of Visegrad countries' environmental NGOs.



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In order to get an overall picture on the Visegrad countries' situation, a discussion was held on the participating country's Green Infrastructure status and how the formulated questionnaire, which was suggested as a basic methodology for the analytical study, can be amended in the light of the national conditions.

A leaflet will be made on the general results and recommendations, which will form the very foundation of the presentation held in the Polish presidency event, Planning for Biodiversity in November 7-9, 2011.

The presentation, the questionnaire and the pictures of the meeting can be found on the website of the project:

http://ceeweb.org/workingareas/visegradfund_conserving_natural_heritage/index.htm

Further information:

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