Bilateral meeting between Ladislav Miko and CEEweb for Biodiversity

16 September 2008, Brussels

Concept for discussion

General and political environment for nature conservation in CEE
The transition brought crucial political, social and economic changes in Eastern European countries. Almost 20 years after this turnover, economic growth still dominates the political agenda, while environmental issues have very low priority and the environmental awareness of people is low. EU accession, so far, seems not to have changed this general lack of political and general interest.

- How do NGOs see the general political and public environment for nature conservation in CEE countries?
- What has changed since 2004? How do CEE countries respond to the challenges of implementing EU biodiversity policies?
- What can we do so that the EU does not mean simply more EU funds for us, but also better environment?

Management of Natura 2000 sites
EU 10 countries have now four years of experience with implementing Natura 2000 management measures. We would like to discuss the best examples of management practices and models from the region and assess the remaining challenge to achieve the obligations described in Art. 6 of the HD. In special we will make a review of the existing management planning practice of CEE countries.

- How is the progress with the preparation of management plans in CEE countries? Why are there so few management plans existing/under preparation? Could there be more? What other management options exist?
- How does the future financing of activities included in management plans look like?
- Are management plans being prepared for the drawer or for real use? What is likely to be the future of Natura 2000 management plans prepared?

Institutional framework, public administration
Insufficiencies in the institutional framework seem to be major problems of implementing Natura 2000 in CEE. Ministries of Environment, authorities and other institutions struggle to be a strong advocate for Natura 2000. Lacking capacities are just one of the reasons, but also other factors lead to incompetent implementation. NGOs witness more and less serious failures resulting from this every day.
• How can the Commission ensure the better implementation of the Nature Directives at national level?
• How can NGOs support the better implementation at national level?
• When is there an end of the “learning period” for CEE countries?

Illegal destruction of Natura 2000 sites

NGOs think the number of destructed Natura 2000 sites reported to national authorities is lower than the real number of such cases. The cases reported to the Commission represent only the tip of the iceberg. In some countries illegal, large-scale construction works are everyday practice. Irreparable damages of Natura 2000 sites can happen without being noted or having any further consequence.

• Why is illegal destruction in CEE countries so easy?
• How can the Commission push for more transparency and less corruption especially if this affects conservation goals?
• What was achieved through infringement procedures so far? What is the progress on ongoing infringement cases? Is there a need for more infringements in some countries?

Natura 2000 and forests

Some countries (e.g. Slovakia) have already made the first steps towards a good Natura 2000 management within the forestry sector (introduction of positive examples). In other countries (e.g. in Hungary, Poland) the situation is worse or simply unchanged since 2004, with infringement cases started as a result. In general, achieving sufficient Natura 2000 implementation within the forestry sector still remains a challenge.

• Which EU countries could serve as the best practice example for Natura 2000 forest management?
• How can the Commission and NGOs work better together and with the forestry sector?
• EC guidelines for forest Natura 2000 – will it be prepared?

Site designation

Site designation is almost finished in most of the new Member States, but the process resulted in big differences for the respective countries. While the long time problem-country Poland seems to approach a satisfactory ending of the designation process under the new government, much remains to be done in Romania (and less so in Bulgaria) until 2009, the official date for clearing insufficiencies resulting from the Biogeographic Seminar.

• Can we explain the big differences between some CEE countries with scientific arguments exclusively? Can or should we do more in some countries?
• How can the Commission and NGOs in Romania and Bulgaria support each other in the follow-up to the biogeo seminar?

Drivers of biodiversity loss

Natura 2000 is the cornerstone of EU biodiversity legislation - but it couldn’t stop or revert biodiversity loss in the old EU member states. While Natura 2000 is an essential contribution
to nature protection, it is not a question that alone it cannot stop biodiversity decline in the CEE region either. CEEweb thinks that after 2010, the EU biodiversity policy needs to be completed through policies targeting the real drivers of biodiversity loss. This is an interest of the region, maybe even more than of old member states.

- How can the current socio-economic structures be changed to harm nature less?
- How could a wider EU biodiversity policy framework look like? What will be the role of Natura 2000 in a wider EU biodiversity policy after 2010?
- What support can NGOs give to the Commission in this regard?

Different issues

Transposition problems of EU nature legislation (BHD, LD)

Art 17 reports - how reliable they are in CEE countries? Why is the internet consultation tool so complicated to understand even for experts?

HD Art 12 implementation - how it works in practice in CEE?