

Report of the First Extraordinary Meeting of the Prespa Park Co-ordination Committee

Thessaloniki, 29 June 2001

Hosted by EKBY – Greek Biotope-Wetland Centre

At the invitation of its Chairman, Mr. Metodjia Dimovski, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the FYR of Macedonia, the Co-ordination Committee (CC) of the Prespa Park held its first extraordinary meeting in the facilities of EKBY – Greek Biotope-Wetland Centre at Thessaloniki, on June 29, 2001.

The meeting was attended by all CC members from the three countries involved and from Ramsar/MedWet, as well as by observers from national and international organisations and bodies (see the complete list of participants below).

Agenda

- 1. Opening of the meeting by the CC Chairman.**
- 2. Elaboration of a PDF-A request to be submitted to the GEF**
Presentation by Mr. Nick Remple, UNDP.
Questions and discussion
- 3. Draft Concept Paper** (Working Documents, Appendix I and II)
Presentation by Dr. Goetz Shuerholz, KfW consultant
Questions and discussion
- 4. Administrative issues pending from the CC first ordinary meeting**
(Working Documents, Appendix III)
Presentation by the CC Secretariat
Discussion
- 5. Closure of the meeting**

Summary Minutes

Opening the meeting, the Chairman, Mr. Dimovski, welcomed all participants and introduced the general topic of discussion for which an extraordinary CC meeting was deemed necessary, namely how to develop a proposal for a transboundary project for the Prespa Park that will be eventually submitted to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for co-funding. The Chairman recapped relevant activities that took place since the first ordinary meeting of the CC in January and gave the floor to Mr. Nick Remple (UNDP) to present the initial project development funding (PDF-A) procedure that is available in order to prepare the required Concept Paper.

Mr. Remple said that the PDF-A procedure is a good chance that should be used to check whether the GEF would in principle accept the idea of a project for Prespa. Ms. Akhtar (UNDP), who was unable to attend this meeting, had actually started preparing the PDF-A request, as agreed by all CC members during the round of long-distance consultations that took place during the past few months. The PDF-A funds could go towards establishment of protected areas, capacity building, meetings, local community consultation and institutional strengthening, while the KfW could co-finance other aspects. He added that this would give the CC the chance to clarify its own thinking on the planning for the Prespa area and present a good case to the GEF Secretariat.

Answering questions posed by other participants, Mr. Remple added that a PDF-A request could be submitted at any time, as long as it was accompanied by letters of endorsement by the GEF Focal Points in the recipient countries; support letters from Greece and the Ramsar Convention would also be useful, whereas secured co-financing is not a precondition in the PDF-A request procedure. He also explained that after the PDF-A funds are obtained and a Concept Paper is submitted, the Co-ordination Committee can either submit a PDF-B request to obtain funds for further preparatory actions or it can proceed directly to submitting a full-project proposal.

Mr. Schuerholz (KfW consultant) questioned the need for PDF-A funds since there already exists the Concept Paper he has drafted with various amendments by the CC members and UNDP staff.

Mr. Papayannis noted that the Prespa Park process is very special. In Prespa, the three countries involved are developing a common view for the area, and, for that, more dialogue is needed, so that, at the end, the result is not a set of unrelated activities, but a joint vision for Prespa.

The Chairman then proposed to change the order of the items on the agenda, and discuss the draft Concept Paper prepared by the KfW consultants, before deciding whether to submit a PDF-A request.

Mrs. Malakou (SPP) then made a brief presentation of the progress to date with the Strategic Action Plan project carried out by the three participating NGOs. She noted that the project started in February, and so far a study of the existing environmental and socio-economic situation of the Prespa Park area has been completed; an initial assessment shows that there is a lot of information available on the environment of Prespa, but less so on the socio-economic facts.

Mr. Papayannis then posed the question how to co-ordinate the three documents produced so far, namely the draft Concept Paper, Ms. Akhtar's draft PDF-A request, and the Strategic Action Plan study.

Mr. von Bechtolsheim (KfW) expressed KfW's readiness to provide whatever funds are necessary in order to develop a full-project proposal.

Mr. Germanidis (Mayor of Prespa/ Greece) noted that there should be substantial local community involvement in the whole process; he stressed that the local society of Prespa is

the stakeholder most familiar with the problems and needs of the area, and they have carried out relevant studies that have lasted many years. He concluded that the Co-ordination Committee should proceed with a PDF-A request as explained by Mr. Remple.

Mr. Dedej (NEA/ Albania) agreed with the idea that local community involvement is very crucial and added that in none of the three documents mentioned before have the special objectives of the future programme yet been identified. He also suggested that any forthcoming funding be used to clearly articulate the solutions that could mitigate the threats the Prespa region is faced with.

Mr. Papayannis then enquired into whether Ms. Akhtar could finish writing up the PDF-A request soon. Mr. Remple replied positively. Mr. Kouvelis (Ministry of Environment/ Greece) stated that he sees no problem in synthesising the existing papers with some financial support, in view of the fact that the Strategic Action Plan project does not have very large funds available.

Mr. Germanidis added that the Co-ordination Committee should submit the PDF-A request with Ms. Akhtar's help and this could be done in a short period of time.

Prof. Micevski (MAP) then suggested that it could be wise to wait for the preparation of the Strategic Action Plan and then submit a PDF-A request. The Chairman noted that the Strategic Action Plan will be included in the full-project proposal and he suggested that the UNDP prepare a PDF-A request within a short period of time with quick consultations with the Committee members. The Prespa project will thus enter the GEF pipeline, and the outcome of the PDF-A activities should be a proposal for a full-scale project.

Mr. Papayannis suggested that there should be another two items on the meeting's agenda: a logo and a map for the Prespa Park. Several participants commented on these points and informed the meeting that the Secretariat is working on proposals for the logo, and that the Strategic Action Plan study will produce a comprehensive map of the Prespa Park area. Mr. Schuerholz expressed the opinion that unless the Ohrid Lake were to be included, GEF would not be forthcoming with assistance to a Prespa project.

The discussion then focussed on whether it is worth going into point-by-point comments on the draft Concept Paper as amended by UNDP (Working documents, Appendix II). Several CC members thought there should be a clear decision on whether to submit a PDF-A request or a Concept Paper to the GEF, because in the first instance there would be no point in discussing the existing draft in detail. Mr. Remple expressed the opinion that it would be wrong to present a Concept Paper without presenting a PDF-B request quickly afterwards, and he did not think that the CC is ready to draft a PDF-B proposal; to illustrate his point he drew a flowchart with the successive steps towards a full-project proposal to the GEF. The Chairman proposed a compromise solution, namely to proceed with detailed discussion of the draft Concept Paper without deciding whether it will be submitted as such at this point; the resulting document could well be used as the basis for a PDF-A document if the CC so decided.

The participants agreed and Mr. Schuerholz led the discussion on each paragraph of the amended draft Concept Paper.

In paragraph 1 (Project Title), it was decided to substitute "Prespa Lakes region" with "Prespa Park region".

Paragraph 2 (GEF Implementing Agency) remained unchanged.

Paragraph 3 (Countries in which the project is being implemented) remained unchanged, with the general remark by Mr. Kouvelis that the official full name of the FYR of Macedonia should always be used.

In paragraph 4 (GEF Focal Area(s)), "climate change" was omitted, although Mr. Dedej and Mrs. Malakou expressed some reservations.

Paragraph 5 (Operational Program/ Enabling Activities/ Short-Term Measure) remained unchanged.

In paragraph 6 (Country Drivenness), some factual mistakes were noted and instructions for their correction were given.

In paragraph 7 (Context), it was decided to add a paragraph on the GEF project for lake Ohrid, to be prepared by the Albanian and Macedonian Government representatives; the SPP undertook to provide more accurate and complete information on the biodiversity of Prespa, as well as some demographic information. The issue of the map of the project area to be included in an Annex was also discussed; the existing map was found inappropriate because it did not focus squarely on the Prespa Park area, and the PPNEA representative undertook to provide a more suitable map. Reference to the designation of a "Biosphere Reserve" was also omitted.

Paragraphs 8 (Project Rationale and Objectives) and 9 (Expected Outcomes and Activities of Full Project) were discussed together. The participants agreed that these two paragraphs are very crucial and need to be further elaborated and to lay down specific objectives. To this end, Mr. Kouvelis noted that the forthcoming results of the Strategic Action Plan study have to be incorporated. Mr. von Bechtolsheim presented a small paper with his contribution to these paragraphs, while Mr. Schuerholz undertook to present some draft activities to be co-financed by GEF after a short break.

After the break, Mr. Kontos (EKBY) made a brief but interesting presentation of the Greek-Albanian project currently implemented by EKBY concerning the compilation of an inventory of Albanian wetlands.

Subsequently, Mr. Schuerholz presented his proposal on the activities of the Prespa project, which included sustainable protection of the designated conservation units; sustainable economic development of the support zones; stabilisation of the Micro Prespa water system; prevention of lake contamination; rehabilitation of degraded forest lands and sustainable range management; improved living conditions of the poor rural populations; increased environmental awareness; well-established and functioning administrative structure for Prespa Park; legal and policy framework for sustainable development and management of the Prespa Park; efficient law-enforcement agencies to ensure ecological integrity of protected areas and compatible land use in the support zones; sustainable financing for the protected areas inside the region.

Several CC members commented that there was clearly a need for more time and funds in order to reach a better understanding among all stakeholders and formulate the objectives and activities of the project more clearly; to that effect, project development funds, that could come either from the GEF (PDF-B) or from KfW, are needed.

Under paragraph 10 (Sustainability and Replicability of the Full Project), the issue of counterpart contributions was discussed; the issue of specific commitments to be made by the recipient Governments was referred to the next CC meeting.

In paragraph 11 (Country Eligibility), reference to the Ramsar Convention - although not a formal eligibility criterion - was thought to be useful in order to show the countries' commitment to the objectives of the Ramsar system.

Under paragraph 12 (Stakeholders involved in Project), there was some discussion on how broadly the stakeholders involved should be defined, and it was decided that the main emphasis should be placed on the membership of the CC.

In paragraph 13 (Information on Project Proponent), it was agreed that the CC and the competent national authorities are the most appropriate entity to act as project proponent. The CC Secretariat undertook to provide detailed information on the Committee. The issues of whether Greece could formally be a proponent, and whether KfW could be an "executing agency", were thought to be in need of further clarification. It was also decided that the table

included in the paragraph should be put in an Annex with some explanation of the relation of each project included therein to the proposed project; other related projects funded by the Greek Government and ProNatura should also be included.

Under paragraph 14 (Financing Plan of Full Project), it was decided to add contributions by other donors, such as the Greek Government; however, it was not yet clear what constituted baseline funding and what co-funding of the GEF project.

In paragraph 15 (IA Co-ordination and Linkages to GEF and IA Programs and Activities), it was agreed to include reference to the MedWetCoast programme.

Under paragraph 16 (Proposed Project Development Strategy), there was some discussion on the merits of applying to GEF for PDF-B funds or obtaining the necessary funds from KfW. The first option was thought to have the advantage of entering into close consultations with the GEF, which could contribute towards a successful full-project proposal. However, a decision on this issue is to be taken at a later stage.

Finally, the Chairman wrapped up the preceding discussion with instructions to the KfW consultant to also take into account all comments submitted by the CC members in writing and redraft the Concept Paper within ten days. More specifically, the decision of the CC, as expressed by its Chairman, was the following:

1. Redraft the Concept Paper within ten days
2. Distribute the new version of the Concept Paper to the CC members through the CC Secretariat
3. Carry out consultations between CC members for one month
4. Unless a substantial issue of controversy arises, create a final draft and submit it to the CC Secretariat
5. Approve the final draft at the next ordinary CC meeting in September and decide on the future project development strategy (PDF-B or KfW funds)
6. Submit the Concept Paper to the GEF in November
7. Provided that the GEF approves the Concept Paper submitted, proceed with the chosen project development strategy in order to prepare a full-project brief

Subsequently, Mr. Remple made a useful presentation on project development under GEF.

There followed a discussion of the last item on the meeting's agenda, namely of some administrative issues pending from the first ordinary meeting of the CC. Dr. Shumka (PPNEA) introduced the discussion on behalf of the Secretariat, on the basis of the working documents of the meeting (Appendix III).

The first issue was the approval of the new formulation of paragraphs 13 and 21 of the CC Operating Arrangements (Annex II of the Skopje meeting report). The formulations approved are the following:

13. Costs: The Committee will proceed to secure funding for its meetings through various sources. This will include travel and subsistence of the delegations of the other two countries, rental of the meeting place (if no public facility is available), stationary and photocopying and reasonable hospitality expenses. The host agency will prepare at least three months in advance a budget for the meeting and submit it to the Secretariat.

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 21. Costs: The Committee will proceed to secure funding for the operation of its Secretariat through various sources. The relevant costs will include a modest remuneration of its members, as well as travel and operation expenses. A detailed budget for such costs shall be prepared by the Secretariat and approved by the CC as part of the work plan.

The second issue was the designation of the persons entitled to replace the CC members in case of absence, according to paragraph 3 of the CC Operating Arrangements:

3. Alternative members: Each member of the CC will designate an alternative person, authorised to replace him/her in case of inability to attend with full membership rights.

Mr. Dedej objected to the Secretariat's reading of the rule and expressed the view that there is no need to appoint alternative members in advance, but only *ad hoc*, i.e. each time a CC member is actually unable to attend. A final decision on the issue was postponed for the next ordinary CC meeting.

Subsequently, the CC members approved the amended budget of the CC for the year 2001 (Annex V of the Skopje meeting report).

Finally, the Chairman expressed the gratitude of the CC to all participants, and especially to the host organisation, EKBY, who had kindly offered its staff and facilities for the organisation of this extraordinary meeting, and declared the meeting closed.

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