

Address by Mr Joseph Falzon (EPP) Malta

on the report: "The need to assess progress in the implementation of the Bern Convention" presented by Mr Aleksei LOTMAN, Estonia, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs

Dear President and members of this Assembly.

The subject in caption as brought forward by Mr Lotman is a call for all nations to act persistently and devote particular attention to the implementation of the Bern Convention. As Last year (2010) was the occasion of the International Year of Biodiversity, and as we are in the beginning of the United Nations decade for Biodiversity (2010 – 2020); it is very important for each and one of us, and for all our nations to assess the progress in the Implementation of this Convention.

The entire world demands substantial progress in implementing this convention.

The Bern Convention was very instrumental in my country Malta by means of the Emerald Network process, through which the following main phases were developed:

1. The selection of the sites eligible as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCIs);
2. The setting up of appropriate legislation;
3. The attainment of data in line with the requirements posed by the Standard Data Entry Forms;
4. The inputting of data into the Emerald Network/Natura 2000 Software in the format of Standard Data Entry Forms.

This project which was coordinated by the Ecosystems Management Unit with assistance from the Malta Environment & Planning Authority is a very effective tool in the nature protection of our islands.

As a contracting party to the Bern Convention, substantial efforts were dedicated for the protection of Maltese wildlife and natural habitats, Malta has entered into an agreement with the Council of Europe for the implementation of a pilot project on the setting up of the Emerald Network which was launched in Malta on 15th November 2001.

As Chairman of the Committee on Sustainable Development of the Council of Europe, whilst congratulating the rapporteur for his excellent report, I urge the members of this Parliamentary Assembly not only to support this report but to urge national parliaments, and respective authorities to engage in a constant assessment on the implementation of this Convention. This is a very serious issue today and will be much more crucial tomorrow. We have to share our responsibilities for the common good. Environmental degradation, depletion of biological diversity and alteration of ecosystems affect directly and indirectly a range of fundamental human rights defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by the European Convention on Human Rights, namely right to life, to access to food and water, to health, to adequate housing and to property and land use.

We have to focus more clearly and put particular efforts in addressing environmental matters in order to achieve the aims and objectives of the Bern Convention.

Thankyou Mr President

EMERALD Network (Malta)

The Emerald Network is an ecological network made up of "areas of special conservation interest", which was launched by the Council of Europe as part of its work under the Bern Convention. It is to be set up in each Contracting Party or observer state to the Convention.

It involves all the European Union states, some non-Community states and a number of African states. The European Community, as such, is also a Contracting Party to the Bern Convention. In order to fulfil its obligations arising from the Convention, particularly in respect of habitat protection, it produced the Habitats Directive in 1992, and subsequently set up the Natura 2000 network. The Emerald Network is based on the same principles as Natura 2000, and represents its de facto extension to non-Community countries.



This project has been realised with the financial assistance of the Council of Europe

The objective of the Bern Convention is to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats, especially those requiring the co-operation of several States. The Convention places a particular importance on the need to protect endangered natural habitats and endangered vulnerable species, including migratory species. The Appendices of the Convention provide the lists of wild species that are protected by the Convention. Appendix I includes wild flora species and Appendix II lists the animal species requiring special protection, while the wild fauna species of Appendix III are protected but their "exploitation" can be regulated in accordance with the Convention. The appendices were last modified in 2000 (see the full version in CD-ROM enclosed).

The case-files system

In its 25 years of existence, the case-file system of the Bern Convention has proven to be an excellent tool to achieve the aims of the Bern Convention through international co-operation. The system is based in complaints for possible breaches of the Convention that are processed by the Secretariat, the Bureau and the Standing Committee according to their merits and on the basis of the information submitted. When the Standing Committee or its Bureau considers that further information is needed, they can arrange for on-the-spot visits by independent experts, who report to the Standing Committee. Many case-files are at the origin of Recommendations adopted by the Standing Committee and addressed to a particular country or group of countries to redress a problem with the application of the Convention concerning the protection of a wild species or natural habitat under threat. Finally, and if everything else fails, Parties to the Bern Convention have recourse to arbitration as a dispute-settlement method available to them but which so far remains unused...

The negotiators and drafters of the text of the Bern Convention must be credited as the authors of a very innovative legal text as they provided it with unique features at the time. The Bern Convention is much more than an international agreement about environmental protection. It takes account of the role that people play in the wider environment and their interactions with nature. It recognises the value of wild flora and fauna that needs to be preserved and passed to future generations. The Convention incorporates important principles such as precaution, integration, participation and co-operation long before they were mainstreamed. In short, the Bern Convention is a tool for achieving sustainability and as such, it is an important contribution "made in Europe" to the sustainable development of life on this planet. Nature protection is therefore at the heart of the cultures and values of European societies. Biodiversity is a critical element to guarantee peoples' right to a healthy environment and achieve sustainable development, two goals which are directly related to the values and objectives of the Council of Europe.