

6th July 2012

6th Pan-European Green Belt Conference: Appeal for the Preservation of the Mavrovo National Park

Decision reached on a comprehensive programme of tasks to strengthen the Pan-European Green Belt initiative

Agreement between Finland, Russia and Norway is acknowledged as a model

Radolfzell/ Nürnberg/ Mavrovo. The 6th Pan-European Conference on the European Green Belt in the Mavrovo National Park (FYR Macedonia) closed with an appeal for the conservation and protection of the natural treasures so far preserved in the shadow of the former Iron Curtain. The European Green Belt with a total length of 12.500 kilometers reaching across Europe is a connected habitat representing an invaluable place of retreat for many plant and animal species.

Speaking at this conference Christel Schroeder, president of the EuroNatur Foundation, said “To offer long-term protection to the notable natural treasures of the Green Belt by designating national parks and nature reserves is a pressing task of nature conservancy in Europe” and concluded with the demand: “We appeal to all governments of the countries through which the Green Belt runs to assure the survival of these important elements in the nature heritage of Europe. Major and nature-destructive infrastructure projects which cut up and endanger the Europe-wide connected habitat must not receive government approval”.

The conference with its roughly 100 participants representing 21 countries along the European Green Belt focussed their particular criticism on the endangering of the Mavrovo National Park. Two major hydro-electric power plants are planned and they are to be financed by the World Bank and the EBRD. Alongside these, numerous smaller hydro-power plants with a network of access roads would cover the entire National Park, which counts as one of the environmental pearls in the Green Belt precisely because of its vast untouched forests.

Kai Frobel, representative of BUND, appealed to the Macedonian Environmental Minister Ademi, who had opened the conference, to conserve nature in the Mavrovo National Park. To produce electricity from renewable sources Macedonia with its sunny climate should turn to photovoltaic solutions and not hydro-power in National Parks and other sensitive areas.

As organizers of the 6th Pan-European Green Belt Conference, the Conservation Foundation EuroNatur and BUND (German Association for Environment and Nature Conservation), draw a positive conclusion. The conference is a milestone on the path to further development of a powerful movement to protect the Green Belt in Europe. The conference was supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with funding from the German Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Reactor Security. Dr Uwe Riecken, the Head of the relevant Department at the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, stressed the present Federal Government's support for the Green Belt initiative: "In the current coalition agreement, the goal has been explicitly formulated to strengthen the European initiative alongside securing protection of the German Green Belt. This gives the European Green Belt powerful political backing."

One area to be highlighted is the new development in the northernmost section of the European Green Belt. The governments of Finland, Russia and Norway have signed a Memorandum of Understanding in which they make a commitment to work together in the protection of the European Green Belt. This agreement can be regarded as a model for the other sections of the European Green Belt.

The European Green Belt Initiative can also celebrate a major success in the southernmost end of the European Green Belt, in Bulgaria. Protests by citizens there and the intensive involvement and commitment of our Bulgarian partner organisation, the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation have achieved the demolition of an illegally built hotel, directly on the Black Sea in the Strandja Nature Park.

Details of the agreements reached by the conference participants:

- ✧ Up to now the European Green Belt has been divided into three sections. The conference has confirmed that in future there will be four sections:
 - a) Fenno-scandinavian Green Belt (the northern part with Norway, Finland and Russia)
 - b) Baltic Green belt (the area along the Baltic coast)
 - c) Central European Green Belt (The Baltic coast to the river Drava)
 - d) Balkan Green Belt (from the Drava to the Aegean Sea and Black Sea)

- ✧ The conference has also confirmed a new coordination structure for the whole initiative. For each of the four sections the actors in the Green Belt initiative are to choose a regional coordinator by consensus. Each of the governments of the countries along the European

Green Belt will decide on a National Focal Point. Active NGOs working for the protection of the Green Belt will be referred to as Partners of the Green Belt Initiative.

- ✦ The regional coordinators have the task of coordinating activities in their section.
- ✦ The overall coordination of the European Green Belt Initiative will be taken over by Coordination Group consisting of 12 persons to meet at least twice a year. For each section a regional coordinator, one selected National Focal Point and a partner NGO will be represented in this group. IUCN is also a member of the Coordination Group and will support the European Green Belt Initiative.
- ✦ The European Green Belt Initiative is to take on a more formalised shape. Possibilities of founding an Association and a Trust are to be explored.
- ✦ The goal shared by all to coordinate the Initiative across Europe but also in the four sections in a professional manner requires medium and long-term secure funding for the tasks of the Coordination Group and the regional coordinators.
- ✦ Efforts will be undertaken to strengthen the political support for the European Green Belt Initiative. The Countries along the Green Belt will be asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding

Background information

- ✦ The European Green Belt Initiative has set itself the goal of preserving and developing what was once the area of the Iron Curtain dividing Europe over decades and transforming it into a Europe-wide connected habitat for wild life over a length of 12 500 kilometres. Further information at: www.europeangreenbelt.org

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