

To:

Delegates of the Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention

26.11.2021

NGO concerns regarding the financing of the Bern Convention

Dear Delegates of Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention,
Dear members of the Standing Committee,

As you know, the Bern Convention is the only pan-European agreement in the field of nature conservation, also including countries in North Africa. Its mission is to ensure that wild flora, fauna and habitats are maintained at, or restored to, sustainable levels. The Convention enables cooperation and coordination across borders, building bridges between science and citizens, and uniting governments and society at large in a common endeavour. With its instruments such as action plans for threatened species, the Emerald Network of protected areas and the case-file system, it is an indispensable frame for coherent efforts to preserve nature in the whole of Europe and beyond.

As you also know, the financial situation of the Convention is dire. Traditionally, the Bern Convention is financed a) by the Council of Europe's Ordinary Budget and b) by voluntary contributions of Contracting Parties.

With the focus of the Council of Europe (CoE) turning increasingly towards human rights issues, cuts to the Ordinary Budget of the CoE and voluntary contributions decreasing, the financing of the Bern Convention and its ability to operate are increasingly at stake. Staff is reduced, and there is only limited budget for undertaking on-the-spot appraisals and other important tasks.

Present situation

The budget of the Convention for 2022 foresees EUR 725.440 EUR, of which roughly 400.000 EUR are for staff and pensions. Around 330.000 EUR are foreseen for the programme of activities. Of the total amount, 237.000 EUR are expected to come from the CoE's Ordinary Budget, while 488.440 EUR need to come from voluntary contributions.

According to the information provided for the Standing Committee meeting, as per 17/11/2021, 14 parties have paid 219.765 EUR, and another 107.400 have been pledged from further six parties. Thirty parties have not paid or committed anything yet.

In sum, 326.000 EUR are available, which still leaves a funding gap of 162.440 EUR to be filled.

Steps taken so far

The issue of finance has been discussed extensively in recent years, and in result Resolution No. 9 (2019) was adopted at the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee, which contains three elements:

- 1.) A table with suggested scales of voluntary contributions, fixing a sum of 1.300-52.000 EUR to be paid (annex to Resolution No. 9 (2019))
- 2.) An agreement to explore the options of an Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA), which would provide a reliable basis for finance
- 3.) A proposal for an amendment of the convention

Proposed way forward

Also, a working group on finance has been installed, which met four times this year. In result, the Standing Committee, at its upcoming 41st meeting on Nov. 29th, 2021, is asked to:

- 1) Agree on the suggested scale of voluntary contributions as suggested in the annex to Resolution No. 9 (2019)
- 2) Look at the draft Enlarged Partial Agreement elaborated by the working group and the GR-C, (the Committee of Minister's rapporteur group on education, culture, sport, youth and environment)
- 3) Mandate the working group on finance to pursue the further elaboration of the draft amendment for consideration by the 42nd Standing Committee (Nov/Dec 2022) – the WG already produced a draft for an Art. 14 bis which refers the modalities of identifying the scale of financial contributions into an annex.

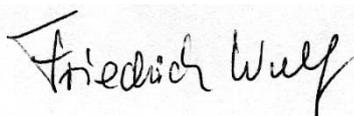
NGO demands

The improvement of the financial situation is an issue of key importance. In order to give the Convention a sufficient, stable and reliable basis and to enable its work, the undersigned Nature Conservation NGOs and Observers to the Bern Convention kindly ask your country to:

- A) As an immediate measure, pay your voluntary contributions as assigned in the suggested scale of contributions if you have not yet done so
- B) Adopt and follow the recommendations proposed in the draft annotated agenda (T-PVS/Agenda(2021)24), see paragraph above
- C) Support the proposed Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA) at the SC Meeting
- D) Join the Enlarged Partial Agreement.

We feel the sums that are at stake are comparatively small compared to other budgets - even more so if you take the huge benefits and technical support the secretariat and the convention deliver for saving biodiversity in Europe and North Africa. Your support, in the interest of our common cause, would be very much appreciated.

Thank you and best regards,



Friedrich Wulf
International Biodiversity Campaigner
Friends of the Earth Europe

On behalf of the following 15 networks and organisations:

