

A NEW PROGRAMME ON NATURE PROTECTION IN MACEDONIA

Fact Finding Mission

Implemented on behalf of the
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

Draft

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ACRONYMS USED

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CI	Conservation International
EU	European Union
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GIS	Geographic Information System
GTZ	<i>Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit</i>
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
IUCN	International Union for Nature Conservation
KfW	<i>Kreditanstalt fuer Wiederaufbau</i>
LEAP	Local Environmental Action Plan
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAFWE	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Resources
MEPP	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning
MES	Macedonian Ecological Society
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NEAP	National Environmental Action Plan
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NORGESVEL	<i>Det Kongelige Selskap for Norges Vel</i>
NP	National Park
PA	Protected Area
PEEN	Pan-European Ecological Network
REC	Regional Environment Centre for Central and Eastern Europe
REDA	Regional Economic Development Agencie
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SGP	Small Grants Programme (GEF)
UCODEP	Italian-based environmental NGO
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	World Bank
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
ZELS	Association of local self-government units in Macedonia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

Fact-Finding Mission

This report is the result of a Fact-finding Mission aimed at a sector-wide analysis of perceived priority needs related to nature conservation in Macedonia in support of defining a potentially suitable Programme for Swiss interventions within the Sub-domain “Protection of Biodiversity”. The report describes the findings of a literature review and a 10-day country visit with focus on a stakeholder analysis, problem analysis, multi-stakeholder brainstorming workshop, and selected site visits.

SECTION 2. SECTOR APPRAISAL

Stakeholder Analysis and Lessons Learnt

The stakeholder analysis concentrated on the main players from the public-, international donor-, and NGO sectors with direct and indirect links to nature- and biodiversity conservation. It is noteworthy that bilateral donors seemingly are withdrawing their support to Macedonia in the areas of environment and nature conservation in view of the country’s candidacy for accession to the European Union (EU) and corresponding IPA-funding.

Major lessons learnt from the stakeholder assessment indicate that in the overall inter-agency cooperation leaves much to be desired. The agency responsible for nature protection is understaffed and under-budgeted with no core funding from the central budget allocated to protected areas. Strategic sectoral documents are outdated. The Strategy on Nature Protection as required by the NATURA 2000 Agenda is still in its infancy. The legal and ecological status of protected areas (PAs) is unknown and protected areas are in urgent need of re-assessment and re-proclamation. Decentralization of PAs proceeds without local empowerment. There is an urgent need to set quality standards for the compilation- and GIS processing of thematic baseline data in accordance with EU standards. The lack of integrated spatial land use planning on an operational scale (local level planning) has been identified as a key barrier to sustainable nature conservation.

The three designated national parks (NPs) are the only PAs supported by international donors. The Management Boards of the NPs lack representation by the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP). The NPs encounter serious problems related to overlapping mandates with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Water Resources (MAFWE), and experience serious unresolved land tenure issues. There is a recognized need of involving MAFWE in the selection, designation and management of all PAs protection forest ecosystems. The three designated and two proposed new NPs are not linked through ecological corridors.

Amongst the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) active in nature conservation the “Macedonian Ecological Society (MES)” plays a key role in all aspects of the country’s conservation efforts. The local NGO “OXO” with support of SDC has successfully mainstreamed environmental and nature conservation issues into school curricula. It is noteworthy that none of the better known international NGOs appears to be active in the country.

Problem Analysis

The problem analysis is based on a selected reference/document review, interviews and discussions with selected stakeholders and the stakeholder assessment. The holistic approach chosen for the problem analysis focuses on the problems related to each of the four Key Pillars of nature conservation namely *Ecological Integrity, Governance, Social Participation and Community Empowerment* and *Financial Sustainability*.

The findings show that the Pillar “Ecological Integrity” has to be re-defined for the predominantly cultural landscapes characterizing Macedonia. Cultural landscapes require a different management approach (active interventions) than pristine landscapes (“hands off” policy). Key problems related to the issue of “ecological integrity” are high fragmentation and highly altered ecosystems; unknown ecological status of PAs and unknown representation of the country’s ecosystems by the current PA system; lacking ecological connectivity; unresolved land tenure issues adversely affecting ecological integrity of PAs; lack of strategic country-wide conservation planning and integrated spatial land use planning.

Key problems related to “Governance” include: decentralization of protected area management without empowerment; insufficient government commitment and support to nature protection; Municipalities and local authorities poorly qualified, equipped, and staffed to deal with nature conservation; no incentives provided to private sector and/or local government to effectively address nature protection needs; conflicting and overlapping legal mandates for nature conservation; poor inter-agency cooperation; and weak institutional structures on both Government levels.

Key problems associated with “Social Participation and Empowerment” are: insufficient emphasis on community involvement in conservation management (of special significance in context with ecological corridors); poorly defined policies regarding participation of civil society in land use planning, management and decision-making processes; insufficient emphasis on benefit sharing and goods and services resulting from nature protection; no incentives which would encourage ownership in environmental- and nature protection by local people; and unwillingness of Government to provide land-ownership to Municipalities and communities (lack of empowerment).

Recognized major problems related to “Financial Sustainability” of nature conservation - in particular protected areas- are: no core funding from central budget allocated to protected areas, biodiversity conservation, and/or the designation of ecological corridors;

difficulties in assessing and valorizing goods and services provided by PAs and biodiversity; poor integration of biodiversity conservation into country's economic and social development; insufficient Government and/or other funding for biodiversity conservation and nature protection; and poorly funded municipalities to deal with biodiversity conservation on local level.

Root Causes of Biodiversity Loss and Challenges

Identified root causes of biodiversity loss in Macedonia are: wide-spread poverty in rural areas following the country's independence and abandonment of State-owned enterprises; high unemployment in rural areas and significant dependency on subsistence agriculture/livestock and natural resources; limited economic alternatives for rural poor in remote and economically marginalized areas; low level of environmental awareness; growing land degradation as a result of unsustainable use; ecosystem fragmentation; poor/no conservation management of protected areas except for the three national parks; no designated ecological corridors to connect designated core conservation areas; lack of integrated spatial land use planning on regional and local level; poor enforcement of Law on Nature; and insufficient Government commitment to biodiversity conservation in view of other priorities.

Recognized Key challenges are: need to stabilize rural population, reduce poverty, create enabling environment for nature conservation (improving inter-agency cooperation, local empowerment, providing core funding), update and enforce key strategic documents related to green sector; establish functioning and complete protected area system; designate ecological corridors; and timely meeting stringent EU accession standards related to nature conservation.

SECTION 3. THE WAY FORWARD

Selection Process of Emerging Priority Programmes

The chosen approach for the selection of priority programmes has been holistic in terms of the physical area selected and complementary interventions to be applied to the area to be covered by one single umbrella programme. This approach provides maximum flexibility to the donor and facilitates programme monitoring and evaluation. Key prerequisites inherent to the holistic approach chosen are the selection of a geographic area constituting a unique ecological entity of high nature conservation value; an area offering favourable framework conditions for successful deployment of the limited SDC funds available for the maximum benefit of nature conservation and people; an area suitable for sustainable integrated development harmonizing economic development, environmental protection, biodiversity conservation and trans-boundary cooperation. In a second step of the selection process a list of Key criteria were defined to be met by potential programs and interventions in order to qualify for SDC funding.

It is apparent that not all challenges can be addressed simultaneously. In order to narrow the scope of suitable programme interventions, priority macro-strategies and principles

have been identified which would best be suited to create an enabling environment, address main drivers of biodiversity loss and recognized priority needs, consolidating sustainable economic development and nature conservation.

Proposed Umbrella Program and Geographic Areas

All things considered, the Umbrella Programme that may best fit the chosen approach and underlying philosophy appears to focus on “integrated ecosystem management on a landscape/water basin level” which happens to coincide with the Multifocal Operational Programme 12 of the Global Environmental Facility. A Multifocal Umbrella Programme would allow best to address the challenges within a given geographic area as long as there exists a clear overall vision for its sustainable development. The two geographical areas chosen are (a) the Osogovo Mountain/Bregalnica watershed, forming part of the Eastern Green Belt of Macedonia and (b) an ecological corridor segment connecting key designated conservation areas within the Western Green Belt.

The biodiversity-rich Osogovo Mountains straddle the international border with Bulgaria and are currently subject to a trans-boundary conservation initiative. This target area covers major micro-watersheds and tributaries of the Bregalnica River Basin which is subject to a proposed SECO intervention (waste water treatment). The sustainable protection of Osogovo Mountain Ecosystems is of paramount importance to downstream communities. The target area has not been subject to any other donor activity in the past. It offers favourable political and socio-cultural-economic framework conditions for a possible umbrella programme which combines nature conservation needs with sustainable economic development for one of the key water catchment areas and river basins in the country. It provides a unique opportunity for a holistic approach to watershed and river basin management promoted by the EU.

The Western Macedonian Green Belt offers a unique opportunity to establish ecological corridors which would connect some of the most significant protected areas of the country. The exact location of the most suitable of the four potential corridor sections to which the proposed umbrella program (i.e., consolidation of nature protection and sustainable economic development) could be applied, has not been defined yet. To date, no designated corridor exists in all of Macedonia although the significance of corridors for biodiversity conservation is widely acknowledged and corridors are flagged as part of the NATURA 2000 Agenda. A holistic approach to the planning and management of an ecological corridor segment would be a novelty to Macedonia to serve as model for other corridors.

Selecting Sub-Programmes and Priority Interventions

Potential sub-programmes and interventions were identified within a participatory brainstorming workshop involving major stakeholders of the country for each of the proposed geographic target areas. The list of priority interventions proposed by the stakeholders has been complemented through interventions needed for a logically conclusive umbrella programme. The resulting interventions address both direct

contributions to nature conservation and contributions to creating an enabling environment for nature conservation. The majority of interventions apply to both proposed geographic target areas.

Interventions proposed for the Osogvo Mountains/Bregalnica target area include contributions to: (a) Integrated Spatial Land-use Planning (ISLUP) as basis for wise land use management (i.e., preparation of an ecological sensitivity- or conservation map layer); (b) the compilation of baseline data in support of the Bregalnica River Basin Management Plan complementary to the proposed SECO water programme; (c) support to the creation of trans-boundary conservation areas; (d) contributions to sustainable rural development in support of creating an enabling environment building on on-going activities and experience; (e) sustainable waste management in conjunction with possible IPA funds; (f) waste water management (addressed for selected municipalities by SECO project); (g) contribution to sustainable range management and land rehabilitation; (h) formalization of cooperation agreements involving key actors in the region; and (i) environmental awareness campaign building on SDC supported OXO and REC program.

Proposed Sub-programmes and interventions to be applied to the proposed ecological corridor section(s) include the same as described for the Osogovo Mountain/Bregalnica Water Basin, except for intervention “(b)” which applies to Bregalnica only. Other potential interventions addressing priority concerns are (a) the need for the elaboration of a regional disaster response plan especially with respect to forest fires; (b) special protection of riparian vegetation within corridors; (c) forest fire management (i.e., early detection, suppression, prescribed burning, awareness building); and (d) sustainable forest management with emphasis on protection forest and social functions of forests.

Another important proposed intervention is aimed at strengthening the MEPP’s Sector of Nature Conservation with focus on contributions to the elaboration of the “National Strategy for Nature Conservation”, a requirement of the NATURA 2000 Agenda for Macedonia and a prerequisite for EU accession. The MEPP has struggled with this issue since 2004 without much progress made.

SDC-Supported Interventions related to Emerging Priority Programmes

Past SDC involvement in direct support of nature protection focused on Pelister National Park. The project was suspended in 2009 failing the MEPP’s compliance with rules related to Governance. The overall success of the project is widely acknowledged, mostly as a result of grassroots oriented participatory management planning and sustainable economic development of communities dependent on the park’s resources.

At current SDC has no active Programme in direct support of nature conservation. Indirect support assisting in the development of enabling framework conditions for nature conservation has been and continues to be the financial support of OXO in an effort to mainstream environmental education into elementary school curricula. The proposed SECO Programme on water management in the Bregalnica watershed is expected to

contribute substantially to an enabling environment related to nature conservation, especially if the protection of upper watersheds will also be addressed by the project.

SECTION 4. NEXT MILESTONES

The next Milestone will be for SDC to decide in favour of or against the proposed programmes and interventions. If the findings and recommendations from this Fact-finding Mission are accepted in principle, SDC will have to decide whether one or both of the geographic target areas proposed should become subject of the proposed feasibility study, the next milestone. Equally, SDC would be expected to decide which of the proposed programmes and interventions to include in the feasibility assessment as a follow-up to the Fact-finding Mission.

SECTION 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The available SDC funding offers the unique opportunity to make a direct and indirect contribution to nature conservation in Macedonia in support of the country's efforts in meeting the rigid NATURA 2000 requirements, a prerequisite for its pending EU accession. Based on the holistic approach chosen for the selection of suitable geographic areas which allows for the application of the proposed Umbrella Program with focus on integrated ecosystem management on a landscape/water catchment area level, the two geographic areas of Osogovo Mountains/Bregalnica Water Basin and the Ecological Corridors of the Western Green Belt were selected as candidate areas. The Osogovo/Bregalnica area appears to be the preferred option pending the results of an in-depth feasibility assessment. Main reasons for the Votum are that the target area has not received any substantial donor assistance to date, offers highly favourable framework conditions, opportunities for trans-boundary conservation and would be supplementary to the proposed SECO water project in the Bregalnica Water Basin.

FINAL REPORT

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

“Switzerland has been assisting Macedonia since 1992, initially covering a wide range of topics and gradually focusing and consolidating the Programme in the sectors of democratic governance, water and environment.

In the Swiss Cooperation Strategy Macedonia 2009 – 2012¹, one of the sub-domains within the second domain of intervention (Water and Environment) is the Protection of Biodiversity. This decision is based on previous Swiss interventions in Macedonia in the field of the nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, as well as on the explicit need stated in the "National Capacity Self-Assessment Project" (UNDP, 2005) for increasing the capacities of the country regarding the implementation of the main national planning documents. The overall objective of this sub-domain is to provide a significant contribution to nature conservation in Macedonia in accordance with EU standards and international agreements.”²

Key principles of the Swiss cooperation strategy with Macedonia are: (a) joint implementation with donor partners in order to generate synergies; (b) shift from project-funding towards contributions to grassroots-based organizations and processes; (c) favouring a more regional approach making optimum use of trans-boundary development opportunities; and (d) creating synergies among different Swiss interventions in the country. Swiss financial cooperation with Macedonia is in support of Macedonia’s ambition to become a member of the EU and NATO. One of the key prerequisite for EU accession is for Macedonia to meet the stringent environmental standards applied by the EU to its member states.

1.2. Fact-Finding Mission Report

The following report is the result of a Fact-finding Mission aimed at a sector-wide analysis of perceived priority needs related to nature conservation in Macedonia in accordance with the ToR for the assignment (Annex 1). This is in support of defining a potentially suitable Programme for Swiss interventions within the Sub-domain “Protection of Biodiversity”, specified as the over-arching goal of the Fact-finding Mission.

Section 1 of this report provides background information on the Fact-finding Mission, the approach taken to the compilation of data and supporting information, and a brief description of constraints encountered during the mission.

¹ SDC, 2009. Cooperation Strategy Macedonia 2009-2012. SDC Archives Bern, Skopje.

² ToR for this Appraisal Mission related to a new Programme on Nature Conservation prepared by the SDC Office Skopje.

Section 2 focuses on the sector appraisal. This is composed of (a) a stakeholder analysis, (b) problem analysis including an assessment of cross-cutting issues such as inter-agency and donor cooperation, and (d) the identification of root causes as recognized drivers of biodiversity loss in the country.

Section 3 describes emerging priority Programmes and potential interventions suitable for Swiss support. Section 4 concentrates on proposed next milestones, and Section 5 on conclusions and recommendations.

SDC retained the consulting services of Goetz Schuerholz (international specialist) and Lidija Fajdiga (local counterpart) for the implementation of this Fact-finding Mission.

1.3. Approach and Methods

The Fact-finding Mission commenced with a literature- and document review, materials pertinent to the assignment supplied by the SDC office Skopje. This was followed by a 10 days country visit that included a field trip with site visits of the Western and Eastern “Green Belt” of Macedonia, two of the country’s identified geographic priority regions for biodiversity conservation. The first part of the country visit focused on meetings with key stakeholders (i.e., public agencies, international donors, NGOs and Academia) actively involved in- and related to nature conservation in the country. A complete list of persons met and interviewed during this assignment is provided by Annex 2.

The second part of the country visit concentrated on the definition and selection of candidate Programmes that would meet the framework requirements for Swiss financial support under the Sub-domain “Biodiversity Conservation”. This involved *inter alia* the implementation of a multi-stakeholder “brainstorming” workshop (see Annex 3 for a list of workshop participants) providing the opportunity to present the preliminary findings of the Mission. This was followed by a discussion of pros and cons of recommendations made and a participatory brainstorming leading to the identification of priority interventions related to the proposed Programme and tentatively selected priority areas. A matrix approach was chosen for the rating and selection of priority interventions for each of the two priority geographic regions potentially suitable to accommodate the proposed Programme(s).

The priority interventions that emerged from the workshop reflect a consensus agreement by the workshop participants (representatives of all major stakeholder groups took part in the workshop).

1.4. Barriers and Constraints Influencing the Fact-Finding Mission

Constraints that complicated the appraisal mission are mostly related to the complexity of the subject matter and the wide scope of the mission. The latter however was deliberately chosen in an effort to cover as many aspects as possible related to- and influencing nature conservation in Macedonia. Overlapping national policies and institutional mandates associated with land- and resource use, in particular in context with nature conservation, are only part of the multi-layered barriers blocking a synchronized effort in support of sustainable nature conservation. Transversal issues related to trans-frontier water- and ecosystem management, climate change, wide-spread unresolved land tenure issues, and largely lacking integrated spatial land use planning on an operational level, constitute other critical issues adding to the complexity of the task at hand.

Against this background the very preliminary and rather global results of this Fact-finding Mission have to be seen. It is emphasized that the primary objective of this mission has been a general sector appraisal only leading to tentative recommendations regarding a potential Programme suitable for Swiss intervention. Hence the Fact-finding Mission provides only the basis for a necessary follow-up and more in-depth feasibility assessment.

SECTION 2. SECTOR APPRAISAL

2.1. Stakeholder Analysis

2.1.1. General Observations

The stakeholder analysis in support of this Fact-finding Mission concentrates on the main stakeholders from the public-, international donor-, and NGO sectors with direct and indirect links to nature- and biodiversity conservation in Macedonia, more specifically to on-going and planned activities in the area of interest. Table 2.1 provides a brief overview of stakeholders contacted for this assignment.

In 2008 a very detailed stakeholder- and capacity assessment of key agencies, institutions and NGOs related to biodiversity conservation in Macedonia had been carried out on behalf of UNDP in preparation of a project proposal to-be submitted to the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) for funding³. This included a comprehensive assessment of the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Resources (MAFWE). The findings of the UNDP supported analysis aptly describe the structure, functions, capabilities and shortcomings of the agencies assessed. Another, equally comprehensive institutional analysis associated with nature protection and biodiversity conservation in support of the same project proposal has been presented by Appleton⁴. Little remains to be added to the two

³ UNDP-GEF/MoEPP, 2008. PIMS 3728: Strengthening the Ecological, Institutional and Financial sustainability of Macedonia's Protected Area system. Protected Areas in Macedonia: Institutional Options. UNDP archives Skopje.

⁴ Appleton M.R. 2008. Protected Areas in Macedonia: An Overview. UNDP archives Skopje.

assessments which aptly describe the most salient features and issues/problems related to the institutions and stakeholders covered by the analysis.

In view of the comprehensive background information available, the stakeholder analysis for this assignment therefore focuses on key stakeholders and those who are not covered by the cited source material (see Annex 4 for details).

Table 2.1.: Stakeholders contacted

Central Government	Current Sector Involvement*
Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP): Biodiversity-, Protected Areas-, Spatial Planning- and GIS Units	Very High
Agency for Spatial Planning	Low
Mavrovo National Park Administration	High
Pelister National Park Administration	High
Galicica National Park Administration	High
Ministry of Agriculture, Forests, and Water Resources (MAFWE): Forestry Department	Low
Regional and Local Agencies	
City of Skopje	High
Regional Economic Development Agency (REDA) Municipality Kiva Palanca	Low
International Organisations	
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/GEF	High
Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Small Grants	Low
European Union (EU) Commission on the Environment	Low
Bilateral Donors	
Kreditanstalt fuer Wiederaufbau (KfW) <i>German Bank for Reconstruction and Development</i>	High
Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)	Low
International NGOs	
Regional Environmental Center (REC)	Medium
Norwegian Royal Society for Development (NORGES Vel)	Low
Union Cooperative for the Development of People (UCODEP), Italy	Medium
National NGOs	
Macedonian Ecological Society (MES)	Very High
FAGRICOM	Low
Pelagonia Regional Development Area (PREDA)	Low
* Very high, high, medium, low (biodiversity conservation and environment)	

In this context it is noteworthy⁵ that bilateral donors seemingly are withdrawing their support to Macedonia in the areas of environment and nature conservation in view of the country's candidacy for accession to the European Union (EU) and as such qualifying for IPA-funding (Instrument for Pre-Accession).

⁵ Natasha Radovanovic, pers. commun. 24th Feb.2010

2.1.2. Lessons Learnt from Stakeholder Analysis

i) Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP)

Sector on Nature Protection

- Understaffed and under-budgeted;
- No core funding from central budget for protected areas;
- Outdated strategic documents;
- Lacking Strategy on Nature Protection for Macedonia (EU requirement as part of NATURA 2000);
- Lacking Red List and Red Data Book;
- Unknown status of protected areas and protected area system;
- Protected area system in need of re-proclamation;
- Unknown status of ecosystem representation by existing PA system;
- No designated ecological corridors;
- Responsible for National Parks only; Governance of all other categories delegated without quality control and proper supervision;
- Only the three National Parks have management plans;
- No representation on Management Boards of National Parks by the MEPP to date;
- Decentralized system for protected area management but no empowerment of local government to comply with task;
- Existence of sound Law on Nature in compliance with EU standards but in need of bylaws;
- Poor working relationship with Forestry Section of MAFWE;
- Far from reaching sectoral EU access requirements.

Sectors on Spatial Planning and GIS

- Need to standardize quality requirements for thematic baseline data collection in accordance with EU standards;
- Need for formal inter-agency work agreements and improvement of inter-institutional cooperation.

Agency for Spatial Planning

- Need for formal work agreement with MEPP GIS Unit;
- Need to socialize data and share with GIS Unit of MEPP;
- Need for improved cooperation with local stakeholders and professional Protected Area (PA) personnel in spatial planning of PAs;
- Need to re-define ecological integrity of PAs;
- Insufficient expertise in area of biodiversity conservation;
- Commercial aspects appear to guide planning agenda rather than conservation concerns;
- No involvement in proposed ecological corridors;
- Need to specify role for the participatory integrated planning of ecological corridors.

Mavrovo National Park and the Union Cooperative for the Development of People

- MEPP not represented on NP Management Board;
- Municipality of Mavrovo not represented on Management Board;
- Un-resolved land tenure issues inside NP;
- Overlapping authority with MAFWE related to range management and forestry;
- Poor working relationship and cooperation with MAFWE;
- NP boundaries not demarcated;
- Ski resort inside NP and other land use not compatible with overarching conservation goals;
- Need to establish and formalize trans-boundary cooperation agreement with Albania and Kosovo;
- Need to better integrate villages located inside the NP into conservation agenda;
- Need for NP business plan and sustainable financing.

Pelister National Park Administration

- No representation of MEPP on Management Board;
- Management Board seemingly too commercially oriented in light of over-arching conservation objectives of the NP;
- No conservation expertise represented on the Management Board;
- Un-resolved land tenure issues;
- Poor cooperation with MEPP and MAFWE;
- No working relationship with Forestry Sector of MAFWE;
- Lacking connectivity with other designated protected areas (fragmentation/isolation);
- Sound management plan and business plan produced with SDC funding;
- Participatory multi-stakeholder elaboration of management plan has produced ownership by local stakeholders.

Galicica National Park Administration

- Un-resolved land tenure issues mostly related to ski-area proposed and promoted by Spatial Planning Agency;
- Poorly qualified NP personnel and need for staff training;
- Alleged over-utilization of forests.

Ministry of Agriculture, Forests, Water and Water Resources (MAFWE): Forestry Department

- No cooperation agreement with MEPP;
- Forestry Sector poor relationship with MEPP, especially with regards to protected areas;
- Need to involve Forestry Sector in PA selection, designation and planning processes;
- Need to re-trench foresters from forest areas converted into protected areas (training for conservation management);
- Need to employ professional foresters in NPs and protected areas where forests are utilized;
- Need for improved cooperation between MAFWE's Forestry Sector and PA planners;

- Lost synergies due to lack of cooperation.

ii) Regional and Local Agencies

City of Skopje

- The City adheres to the “consumer pays” principle. This implies that revenue generated through the sale of water can be used for watershed protection (i.e., goods and services provided by protected areas) as practiced by the City of Skopje. However, the particular omission in the Law on Nature Protection -the absence of provisions relating to payments to be collected from off-site or downstream beneficiaries of PA services-⁶ would make it very difficult for protected area management authorities to collect money from off-site users of goods and services provided by the respective PA.
- Although the City of Skopje has no water rights (i.e., Matka Dam) its cooperation with Line Ministries responsible for water issues appears to be good.
- Co-management agreements and good communication generate synergies.

Regional Economic Development Agency (REDA) Municipality Kiva Palanca

- Need to stabilize livelihood of people in rural areas;
- Need to slow population drain from rural areas;
- Create job opportunities;
- Insufficient municipal land to offer to potential private investors for business development;
- Municipality is under-staffed and under-budgeted;
- Un-resolved land tenure issues;
- No funding provided from the Central Budget to address environmental- and nature protection issues;
- No expertise and/or funds to produce Municipal Environmental Action Plan;
- Poorly qualified personnel to deal with environmental and conservation issues;
- Poor knowledge of needs for nature conservation on municipal level;
- Not equipped to deal with environmental hazards and disasters;
- Need for integrated spatial land use plan of working scale.

iii) International Organizations and Bilateral Donors

In general

- Available IPA funding seems to reduce donor involvement/commitment;
- Dwindling donor funding for Green Sector;
- Need for donor forum and better donor cooperation (create synergies);

⁶ Lucy Emerton. 2009. ECONOMIC VALUATION OF PROTECTED AREAS: Options for Macedonia. UNDP archives Skopje.

- Donor projects appear donor-driven not reflecting priority needs within Green Sector;
- Donor support too much focussed on nature conservation in western Macedonia;
- Need to improve assistance to country in meeting EU accession requirements.

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United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/GEF

- GEF funding for Macedonia dramatically decreasing;
- UNDP only active implementing agency of GEF funds in Macedonia.

Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP)

- Need to better promote SGP in the country especially amongst Municipalities in need of funds for nature conservation projects and creation of enabling environment;
- SGP provides excellent opportunities for community- and NGO projects related to Green Sector.

European Union Commission on the Environment

- Highlights shortcomings of Macedonia in reaching NATURA 2000 goals;
- More emphasis to be placed by the MEPP on priority goals defined by the NATURA 2000 agenda (meet deadline);
- Insufficient IPA funds available for the MEPP to comply with its tasks.

Kreditanstalt fuer Wiederaufbau (KfW) German Bank for Reconstruction and Development

- Good coordination with other donors (UNDP/GEF);
- Lessons learnt from Pelister applied to Galicica;
- No further financial support to Green Sector planned on termination of the Galicica Project.

Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)

- Legal mandates for water sector in Macedonia very confusing;
- Poor inter-institutional cooperation in water sector;
- Overlapping mandates leading to loss of synergies;
- Cooperation potential with SECO to be assessed, especially regarding Bregalnica watershed.

iv) International and National NGOs

Regional Environmental Center (REC)

- Grassroots orientation of REC efficient and effective;
- Highly successful development of environmental didactic material applied to important target groups;
- Sound cooperation with the SDC-supported OXO activities related to mainstreaming environmental education into elementary school curricula;
- Good cooperation potential in support of the development of environmental action plans and –strategies jointly with municipalities.

Norwegian Royal Society for Development (NORGESVEL)

- The unresolved land tenure issue is a recognized key barrier to sustainable rural development in Macedonia, in particular as it affects the rural poor⁷;
- Agricultural leasing system of state land in urgent need of improvement; one-year leases too short for economic planning, leading to soil degradation;
- NORGESVEL performs excellent work at grassroots level combating poverty alleviation and stabilizing rural livelihoods in remote and biodiversity-rich areas;
- Good cooperation potential for SECO/SDC regarding Bregalnica River Basin project.

FAGRICON and Pelagonia Regional Development Area (PREDA)

- The Land tenure issue associated with agriculture is one of the key concerns of FAGRICON. The problem is that former State owned farm-land (State operated Khovkhose) is currently tendered on a one-year lease basis which does not allow for long-term planning and/or crop rotation by farmers. This system is unsustainable leading to soil degradation and impoverishment of farmers dependent on lease land⁸.

Macedonian Ecological Society (MES)

- Very professional NGO with strategically well-planned portfolio;
- Excellent vision regarding conservation needs and potential of Macedonia;
- Well informed, sound networking, good cooperation with national and international partners, visionary and on leading edge regarding trans-boundary cooperation and biodiversity research;
- Well respected and reputable NGO of high international standing;
- Well focussed on priority issues related to biodiversity conservation;
- Fully cognizant of the need to designate and develop ecological corridors;
- Excellent potential partner for planned SDC project; should be twinned with SECO project Bregalnica watershed.

Union Cooperative for the Development of People (UCODEP)

- Unresolved land tenure issues are barriers inside and outside protected areas;
- Lessons learnt from Pelister and Galicica need to be better applied to Mavrovo;
- All activities of NGO in Macedonia confined to Mavrovo National Park.

2.2. Problem Analysis

The problem analysis is based on a selected reference/document review, interviews and discussions with selected stakeholders during the Mission to Macedonia, and the stakeholder analysis presented in Chapter 2.1 of this report. The holistic approach chosen for the problem analysis focuses on the problems related to each of the four Key Pillars of nature conservation:

⁷ Asborne Johan Garne, Chief Representative of NORGESVEL in Macedonia, pers. comm.. 27th of March 2010

⁸ Alaksandar Nikolovski, President FAGRICON, pers. comm..24th of Feb,2010

- *Ecological Integrity*
- *Governance*
- *Social Participation and Community Empowerment*
- *Financial Sustainability*

The following chapters highlight recognized barriers to the four pillars related to nature conservation and biodiversity protection.

2.2.1. Barriers Related to Ecological Integrity

i) The meaning of Ecological Integrity

Ecosystems have integrity when their native components are intact, including: abiotic components (the physical elements, e.g. water, rocks); and biotic components: “biodiversity” (the composition and abundance of species and communities in an ecosystem, e.g. forest, grasslands, wetlands, etc. represent landscape diversity; bears, trout, pine trees, butterflies etc. represent species diversity); and ecosystem processes (the engines that make ecosystems work such as natural fire, insect infestations and other plagues, natural flooding, predation etc.).

This “classical” definition of ecological integrity applies to largely unaltered landscapes and ecosystems which are not found any-longer in Macedonia. The term “ecological integrity” would therefore have to be re-defined for the cultural landscapes typifying Macedonia; landscapes composed of ecosystems shaped and altered by man over time. Although numerous cultural landscapes may not reflect their original appearance, the original composition of flora and fauna, and the original biological diversity, they may have reached however a new climax stage worthy to protect. Cultural landscape conservation generally will imply active management in order to maintain desirable landscape features of ecological and cultural importance.

The recognized rule applied to protected areas composed of mostly unaltered ecosystems (IUCN categories 1 and 2) is a “hands off” policy, as little interference/management as possible in order to ensure a continuation of natural evolutionary processes. The policy applied to cultural landscapes on the other hand implies active intervention and management in order to maintain the status quo and/or to restore some of the original features if that is a desirable option. Against this background it is apparent that integrated spatial land use planning and the physical planning of protected areas within cultural landscapes requires a substantially different approach than the planning of unaltered ecosystems.

With this in mind it is of paramount importance to adopt a holistic approach to the design of a meaningful protected areas system in a country mostly composed of cultural landscapes where the need for ecological stepping stones and the need for ecological connectivity is of even greater importance than for eco-regions largely unaltered by man. This philosophy is reflected in the following problem analysis which highlights some of the key problems threatening the ecological integrity of Macedonia's mostly cultural landscapes.

ii) Key problems related to “ecological integrity” in Macedonia are:

- Highly fragmented and altered ecosystems;
- Designated protected areas are part of Macedonia's cultural landscapes;
- Undefined ecological integrity of cultural landscapes characterizing Macedonia;
- Unknown ecological and legal status of designated protected areas;
- Unknown ecosystem representation by existing protected areas;
- Existing PA system insufficient to safeguard country's biodiversity;
- Poor consideration of biodiversity protection needs outside PAs;
- Existing PA system in urgent need of re-classification (re-proclamation);
- Undefined Support Zones of PAs (corridors);
- Poor linkages between designated protected areas (ecological corridors);
- Highly scattered, diverse and incomplete baseline data on biological diversity;
- Lack of integrated spatial land use planning related to PAs and ecological corridors;
- Insufficient emphasis on land tenure issues related to PAs, support zones and potential ecological corridors;
- Lack of strategic plan for comprehensive nature protection;
- PA system understaffed, under-equipped and under-financed (poorly qualified staff);
- Insufficient monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity outside (and inside?) PAs;
- Insufficient benefit sharing by PAs with PA neighbours.

2.2.2. Barriers Related to Governance

Except for the three existing national parks (IUCN category 2) which are managed by quasi independent “Public Institutions” (Management Boards), the responsibility for “multi-purpose” protected areas (IUCN category 2) in Macedonia is delegated by Law to “public enterprises”. Natural Monuments, Nature Parks and Protected Landscapes (IUCN categories 3-6) are managed by different entities such as NGOs, Municipalities etc. None of the protected areas receives financial support from the central budget. Except for the three national parks, which continue to be fully financed by donors (exception Pelister NP), most PAs “operate” without a budget. Municipalities with responsibilities for protected areas do not have the means, qualifications, or incentives to finance necessary infrastructure and/or management plans.

Appleton⁹ has conducted a very comprehensive analysis of the current Governance structure related to nature conservation with focus on protected areas in Macedonia. His primary recommendation is to continue with the current decentralized Governance system but significantly improve components of the system. Key problems related to the pillar “Governance” may be summarized as follows.

- Insufficient Government commitment to biodiversity conservation in view of other priorities;
- Weak institutional structure and insufficient capacity to comply with biodiversity conservation mandate;
- Insufficient budget allocation to nature protection and PA system;
- Conflicting and overlapping mandates;
- Poor inter-agency cooperation;
- No integrated approach to nature protection;
- Decentralization but no empowerment;
- Conflicting policies and interests in land and resource use inside and outside PAs;
- Insufficient emphasis on community involvement in conservation management.

2.2.3. Barriers Related to Social Participation and Empowerment

The critical importance of involving civil society in environmental protection and nature conservation is beyond doubt. It is recognized that without civil society ownership in nature conservation environmental degradation will continue to grow exponentially. This has become very obvious in the current debate on global climate change. A concerted effort is needed to slow down the trend of climate change which only can be achieved through a well informed and well motivated civil society.

Translated to the field of nature conservation and biodiversity conservation in Macedonia the actions required to achieve this goal are mostly defined in the country’s environmental action plan and strategy (although in need of updating). Central to the approach to be taken in support of achieving the strategy’s overall goal is that it must be holistic, involving all key stakeholders. This is of special significance in Macedonia where cultural landscapes -characterized by highly fragmented ecosystems protected by even smaller segments through the national protected area system- require highly participatory integrated spatial land use planning involving all stakeholders of civil society and Government.

In this context the importance of ecological corridors as an essential link between proclaimed protected areas are highlighted. Of equal importance is the holistic planning approach to such corridors which has to involve all segments of society. Strategies

⁹ Appleton M.R. 2008. Protected Areas in Macedonia: An Overview. UNDP archives Skopje.

Appleton M.R. 2008. PIMS 3728: Strengthening the Ecological, Institutional and Financial sustainability of Macedonia’s Protected Area system. Protected Areas in Macedonia: Institutional Options

required to achieve civil society ownership in environmental protection and sustainable land use has to be multi-pronged, involving well targeted awareness building campaigns and tangible benefits to be generated for stakeholders through goods and services provided by a healthy and stable environment. Major problems related to the pillar “Social Participation and Empowerment” are described as follows.

- Poorly defined policies regarding participation of civil society in land use planning and management;
- Insufficient involvement of civil society in land- and resource use planning-processes;
- Insufficient involvement of civil society in decision-making processes related to biodiversity conservation and protected area management;
- Insufficient emphasis on benefit sharing and proof to civil society that goods and services resulting from nature protection provide tangible benefits;
- Difficulties in assessment and valorization of goods and services provided by PAs and biodiversity benefiting people;
- Differing perspectives and expectations on all levels and in all sectors regarding biodiversity conservation;
- Insufficient commitment by Government to local empowerment;
- No incentives provided to stakeholders of civil society needed to encourage ownership in environmental- and nature protection;
- Un-resolved land tenure issues;
- Unwillingness of State to provide land to Municipalities and communities (lack of empowerment);
- Lack of integrated spatial land use planning on an operational scale (Municipal and local).

2.2.4. Barriers Related to Financial Sustainability

A comprehensive financial sustainability analysis related to protected areas and nature conservation has been provided by Emerton¹⁰. Little needs to be added to Emerton’s findings and recommendations. The results of Emerton’s assessment and additional findings by Appleton¹¹ related to the same topic, are aptly summarized by a UNDP document as follows:

“The majority of protected areas in Macedonia are unable to function properly, due to insufficient funding. With the exception of National Parks, most protected areas operate on a zero, or negligible, budget. Under-investment in the national protected area system has serious consequences. The reason that certain sites have been designated as

¹⁰ Lucy Emerton. 2009. ECONOMIC VALUATION OF PROTECTED AREAS: Options for Macedonia. UNDP archives Skopje.

¹¹ GEF/UNDP PIMS 3728: Strengthening the Ecological, Institutional and Financial sustainability of Macedonia’s Protected Area System

protected areas is that they generate essential economic goods and services (such as erosion and flood control, protection of clean water supplies, or provision of open spaces for recreation and tourism), contain species and habitats of global conservation significance, or constitute important cultural or heritage monuments. All of these values have been seriously eroded, and some have been lost altogether, due to lack of on-the-ground management. The government of Macedonia's stated policy commitment to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development cannot be achieved without secure and sustainable financial resources".

Key problems related to the pillar "Financial Sustainability" may be summarized as follows.

- No core funding from the central budget is allocated to protected areas, biodiversity conservation, and/or the designation of ecological corridors;
- Low Government investment and interest in protected area system and creation of ecological corridors;
- Agencies mandated with biodiversity conservation under-financed;
- Limited capacity to generate revenues from biodiversity conservation for sustainable nature conservation;
- Poor integration of biodiversity conservation into economic and social development;
- Insufficient Government and/or other funding for biodiversity conservation and nature protection;
- Municipalities poorly funded to deal with biodiversity conservation on local level;
- Insufficient ability to capture and capitalize the goods and services provided by PAs and biodiversity at large.

2.3. General issues of concern related to Macedonia's PA System

Macedonia's current protected area system, considered the backbone of biodiversity conservation, leaves much to be desired. Although the current PA system allegedly covers 7% of the country's land surface area, only few qualitative and quantitative data are available for most of the designated sites. According to informed sources most designated "protected areas" constitute a single feature such as a tree, a rock, a hydro-dam etc., seemingly un-related to biodiversity conservation and not in compliance with IUCN standards. Therefore the need to critically review and re-classify the current protected area system is of paramount priority. Of equal importance appears to be a more systematic ecological gap analysis to provide quantitative and qualitative baselines on ecosystem representation within the current PA system.

A preliminary list of Emerald endangered natural habitat types requiring specific conservation measures has been prepared for Macedonia as part of the Natura 2000 Agenda specifying environmental and nature protection EU entry requirements (Annex 5).

In the supporting documents of the National Spatial Plan for Macedonia (2004) a total of 265 sites of potential conservation value have been identified without providing specific information on the nature and/or the location of the sites. A preliminary assessment of the current PA system by Appleton¹² and the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES)¹³ suggest that may be less than 15 of the 80 designated sites actually qualify as protected areas of any biodiversity conservation value. According to the same sources, PAs in the past have been selected rather randomly and determined chaotically without a scientific basis. No reliable location map and/or coordinates exist for most of the designated protected areas.

Although the need to plan for ecological corridors connecting the highly fragmented and scattered protected areas in Macedonia is widely recognized, no ecological corridor has been established yet.

Key strategic documents related to nature conservation in Macedonia are either outdated, in need of up-scaling/amendment or not enforced. Goals specified in the documents have mostly not been reached, primarily due to insufficient Government commitment and the chronic lack of funding. Key strategic documents are:

- Macedonia's Law on Nature from 2004. The Law on Nature has been prepared in compliance with EU legislation, although **bylaws and subordinate legislation are still missing**, a problem currently addressed by the UNDP/GEF project.
- National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA), a UNDP document from 2005 with findings still valid today (**list of problems related to actions which mostly have not been implemented**).
- National Biodiversity and Action Plan (NBSAP) from 2004. **The document is outdated; most of its proposed actions were never implemented, the goals not achieved.**
- The National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) from 2005 is in urgent need of revision and updating. NEAP 2 from 2006 identifies a series of shortcomings with three recommended priority actions particularly relevant to protected areas:
 - 'Re-valorization', and 'categorization', of 'natural heritage'.
 - Strengthening capacities of, and development of guidelines for preparation and implementation of management plans for protected areas with emphasis on financial mechanisms for nature protection (pilot project).
 - Establishment of a national environmental network.
- The Strategy for Sustainable Development (2009) is not being enforced and is not in compliance with other Government strategic documents¹⁴.

¹² Appleton, pers. comm.. 23.Feb.2010

¹³ MES, pers. comm..26.Feb.2010

¹⁴ PIMS 3728: Strengthening the Ecological, Institutional and Financial sustainability of Macedonia's Protected Area system. Protected Areas in Macedonia: An Overview.

2.4. Root Causes of Biodiversity Loss and Challenges

Identified root causes of biodiversity loss in Macedonia crystallized from the stakeholder analysis. They are well recognized by stakeholders contacted, but only partially addressed by donor-financed and implemented projects in the country. Several of the identified root causes, however, have to be tackled from within, requiring a strong commitment by Government on both levels and a willingness to improve inter-agency cooperation. The most obvious root causes of biodiversity loss are highlighted as follows:

- Wide-spread poverty in rural areas following the country's independence and abandonment of State-owned enterprises;
- High unemployment in rural areas and significant dependency on subsistence agriculture/livestock and natural resources;
- Limited economic alternatives for rural poor in remote and economically marginalized areas;
- Low level of environmental awareness;
- Growing land degradation as a result of unsustainable use;
- Ecosystem fragmentation;
- Poor/no conservation management of protected areas except for the three national parks;
- No designated ecological corridors to connect designated core conservation areas;
- Lack of integrated spatial land use planning on regional and local level;
- Poor enforcement of Law on Nature;
- Insufficient Government commitment to biodiversity conservation in view of other priorities.

The greatest challenge of all facing Macedonia, the donor community and the EU in view of Macedonia's candidacy to EU accession, is how to most effectively tackle the identified root causes. Key challenges are:

- Stabilize rural population;
- Reduce poverty;
- Create enabling environment:
 - Improve inter-agency cooperation especially between MEPP and MAFWE (synergies);
 - Promote donor and NGO cooperation (synergies);
 - Strengthen MEPP Nature Protection Section;
 - Update and enforce key strategic documents related to green sector;
- Establish functioning and complete protected area system;
- Designate ecological corridors;
- Implement integrated spatial planning on operational scale (regional and local level);
- Meet stringent EU accession standards related to nature conservation.

SECTION 3. THE WAY FORWARD

3.1. Selection Process of Emerging Priority Programmes

3.1.1 Approach Chosen

The choice of a suitable Programme(s) for the planned SDC intervention is not easy in the light of the overwhelming needs, challenges and opportunities related to the sustainable nature protection of the country. Needs and opportunities apply to all four pillars of biodiversity conservation as reflected by Chapters “Problem Analysis” and “Lessons Learnt” in this report.

In due consideration of lessons learnt from the stakeholder analysis, a holistic approach for the selection of a suitable Programme is favoured by the Assessment Team; holistic in terms of the physical area to be chosen and the range of possible interventions under the umbrella of one single Programme. The holistic approach allows for the selection of priority measures within a mosaic of options under the same umbrella Programme, at the same time providing the opportunity to expand activities at any time as may be required in response to changing framework conditions. This provides maximum flexibility to the donor and facilitates Programme monitoring and evaluation. The guiding principle for any proposed Programme and intervention within should be a feasible exit strategy with focus on sustainability.

Key prerequisites inherent to the holistic approach chosen for the selection of a suitable Programme are:

- Selection of a geographic area harbouring a unique ecological entity (i.e., water catchment area/river basin, distinct landscape, eco-region etc.) of high nature conservation value, at the same time offering favourable framework conditions for successful deployment of the limited SDC funds available for the maximum benefit of nature conservation and people.
- Favouring focus on a geographical area suitable for the creation of a sustainable integrated development node harmonizing economic development, environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.
- Preference to be given to areas which offer favourable conditions for trans-boundary cooperation (i.e., areas of highest priority in Macedonia are found within the mountain regions shared with neighbouring Albania and Kosovo to the West and Bulgaria to the East both forming part of the Balkan “Green Belt”).

3.1.2. Key Criteria Applied to Programme Selection

In order to narrow the scope of possible programmes and interventions, criteria have been identified against which potential programmes and interventions are checked. In order to qualify possible programmes and interventions have to meet following criteria.

- Compliance with Swiss/SDC-SECO focal development assistance criteria;
- Contributing to reaching NATURA 2000 goals;

- Compliance with national biodiversity strategy and Macedonian priority conservation goals;
- Contributing to national priority sustainable economic development objectives;
- Suitable to maximize conservation effects with limited SDC-SECO funding available;
- Suitable for diversification, amplification and replication;
- Complementary to on-going and planned SDC-SECO interventions/projects and other donor activities benefiting nature conservation and producing synergies;
- Maximizing benefits by addressing different target groups (rural poor, decision-makers, gender, youth etc.);
- Contributing to poverty alleviation and stabilizing rural livelihoods;
- Providing job opportunities;
- Addressing root causes of biodiversity loss and environmental degradation;
- Contributing to nature conservation and biodiversity protection;
- Focus to be on sustainable development nodes;
- Focus on priority conservation goals;
- Complimentary to on-going activities creating enabling environment and visible synergies;
- Existence of favourable local framework conditions;
- Proven political commitment and willingness to cooperate on a municipal and community level;
- Contributing to inter-agency cooperation;
- Complementary to other donor interventions;
- Suitable for partnerships with civil sector, in particular NGOs;
- Contributing to integrated spatial land use planning;
- Visibly benefiting biodiversity.

3.1.3. Generic Macro-Strategies to Consider

It is apparent that not all challenges can be addressed simultaneously and not all barriers removed at the same time. The biggest challenge therefore is to address the right issues at the right time in order to maximize the impacts of selected interventions within the chosen Programme. Independent of the geographic area and Programme chosen, following macro-strategies/principles should be considered for the design of a programme in support of creating an enabling environment for sustainable nature protection and sustainable regional development.

- Design and implementation of effective interventions/strategies that optimize tangible and intangible benefits to identified target groups and biodiversity conservation;
- Establishing and strengthening trans-boundary cooperation in priority development nodes (corridor areas);
- Integrated approach to sustainable land/resource use management and economic development;

- Spatial-land- use planning on a micro level as basis for wise land use decisions including the elaboration of an ecological sensitivity map as part of the mandatory package of biophysical base line mapping;
- Support to participatory policy development for designated land use polygons within development node (selected geographic target area);
- Contribution to centralized and (to-be) socialized data base by providing all pertinent information collected to be stored and processed by existing GIS Unit of MEPP;
- Mainstreaming capacity-, skill development, environmental education and awareness building into programme and interventions building on past and on-going SDC supported activities by OXO and REC;
- Forming alliances with other stakeholders/donors/NGOs in order to synchronize programmes and activities to be complementary to each other and creating synergies, especially on regional/municipal level, in order to generate synergies and avoid work overlap and duplication;
- Selecting interventions that are complementary to on-going activities maximizing efforts to create an enabling environment;
- Designing and implementing comprehensive information and awareness campaign addressing key target groups on local and regional level with focus on chosen programme and interventions and their contribution to an enabling environment for the benefit of nature conservation and people;
- Continuation of efforts related to raising public awareness of environmental issues and nature protection needs;
- Build on Lessons Learnt;
- Design feasible exit strategy for programme and each intervention with focus on sustainability.

3.2 Potential Programmes

All things considered, the Umbrella Programme that may best fit the chosen approach and underlying philosophy appears to focus on “integrated ecosystem management on a landscape/water basin level” which happens to coincide with the Multifocal Operational Programme 12 of the Global Environmental Facility. A Multifocal Umbrella Programme would allow best to address the challenges within a given geographic area as long as there exists a clear overall vision for its sustainable development. This vision is of paramount importance giving direction to the participatory spatial land use planning process as essential basis for informed decisions on best land use. This is in view of expected climate change and the need for sustainable economic development and in an effort to tackle poverty alleviation as the most critical root cause of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss.

The proposed Umbrella Programme may build on lessons learnt from the on-going UNDP/GEF project aimed at catalyzing the adoption of integrated ecosystem management in the trans-boundary Prespa Lakes Basin of Macedonia, Albania, and

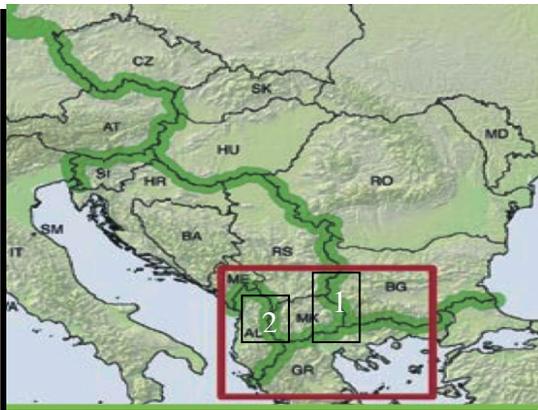
Greece to conserve globally significant biodiversity, mitigate pollution of the trans-boundary lakes, and provide a sustainable basis for the Basin's further social and economic development.

The proposed Umbrella Programme would open the door for the selection of numerous suitable Sub-Programmes for the proposed SDC intervention, designed to contribute to reaching the over-arching goal and objectives reflected by the vision statement for the chosen geographic area.

The holistic approach chosen for the consolidation of sustainable nature conservation and economic development requires the selection of potentially suitable geographic areas which offer favourable framework conditions for the application of the Umbrella Programme and Sub-Programmes.

Against this background the following two geographic areas which may best meet the conditions for the successful application of the proposed Umbrella Programme have been selected. The selection of the two areas is based on the stakeholder and problem analysis and factors highlighted in the previous chapters. Both areas form part of the Balkan Green Belt. The first encompasses the Osogovo Mountain/Bregalnica watershed, the second part of the Western Green Belt of Macedonia (Map 3.2).

Map 3.2.: Location of proposed geographic target areas within the Balkan Green Belt



1 Osogovo Mountain and Bregalnica Watershed are part of the Eastern Section of the Macedonian Green Belt.

2 The proposed Corridor Segments are part of the Western Section of the Macedonian Green Belt.

3.2.1. Osogovo Mountain and Bregalnica Watershed

i) Description of Target Area

The south-west facing slopes of the Osogovo Mountains which straddle the international border with Bulgaria (Map 3.2.1) to the East of Macedonia, constitute approximately two thirds of the Bregalnica upper watershed. The Bregalnica River Basin is a sub-catchment area of the Vardar River which drains about 75% of the country's water resources into Greece and the Mediterranean Sea.

The sustainable protection of the biodiversity-rich Osogovo mountain ecosystems is of paramount importance to downstream communities, especially to the large-scale irrigation of agricultural land concentrated along the Bregalnica- and Vardar River floodplains. The Osogovo ecosystems are composed of deciduous forests covering the lower- and mid-slopes and sub-alpine alpine grassland communities in higher elevation (above 1,600 m).

The new Water Law of Macedonia (2009) stipulates the implementation of integrated river basin management in line with international policies and the EU Water Framework Directive of 2000. A detailed description of the Bregalnica River Basin and the planned intervention by SECO in this target area has been described by Ernst Basler and Partner Ltd.¹⁵.

The Osogovo Mountain is currently subject to a comprehensive trans-boundary conservation initiative spearheaded by the Macedonian Ecological Society in partnership with the Frankfurter Ecological Society, as described in Chapter Chapter 2.1.4, v) of this report.

There is no doubt that the two initiatives (a) Secos's planned Bregalnica Integrated River Basin Management and (b) the trans-boundary conservation project by MES, effectively protecting 1500 square km of critical water catchment area, could create formidable synergies for the benefit of biodiversity conservation and Macedonia's rural population.

This target area has not been subject to any other donor activity in the past offering favourable framework conditions for a possible programme which combines nature conservation needs with sustainable economic development for one of the key water catchment areas and river basins in the country. It offers a unique opportunity for a holistic approach to watershed and river basin management promoted by the EU.

As indicated by the Bregalnica water-related feasibility study report (Ernst Basler and Partner, 2005) and findings by MES, Municipalities and communities of the target area have shown a keen interest in the proposed SECO initiative and the trans-boundary conservation initiative by MES. Hence the political and socio-cultural conditions are highly conducive to the proposed holistic approach to integrated landscape planning with focus on sustainable water management and nature conservation, in particular in the light of expected effects of global climate change on the country.

¹⁵ Ernst BaSLER AND Partner, 2005. Water Sector Programme Macedonia, Bregalnica River Basin Management. Feasibility Study Report prepared on behalf of SECO. Archives Seco Skopje Office.

Map 3.2.1.: Location of the Osogovo Mountain/Bregalnica Watershed



ii) Rationale and Justification

- Ecosystems in the target area under-represented by country's PA system;
- Osogovo Mountain Ecosystems typified by unique flora and fauna;
- Protection needs of micro-watersheds and tributaries of Bregalnica Water Basin;
- Low human population density and low land use pressure in upper watershed areas;
- Need for creation of protection forest;
- Excellent potential for trans-boundary cooperation (existing agreement with Bulgaria);
- Bregalnica one of the country's key watersheds;
- Need for integrated development of Bregalnica River Basin Management Plan;
- Assistance need by downstream communities in support of sustainable water management and irrigation;
- Need to address impacts of mining operations in upper watersheds on downstream communities;
- The target area provides excellent potential for inter-agency cooperation (MEPP and MAFWE) and trans-frontier cooperation.

iii) Enabling Framework Conditions

- Active and advanced involvement of Macedonian Ecological Society to protect Osogovo Mountain Ecosystems and upper watersheds in partnership with Frankfurter Zoological Society and other NGOs;
- Local NGO initiative to create trans-boundary conservation area;
- Ministerial agreement between both countries for establishment of trans-boundary conservation area (signed in 2000);
- Proven commitment to the cause by District authority in Bulgaria and related municipalities in both countries;
- Participatory planning approach involving rural communities with strong local support;

- Existence of sound biophysical baseline data (provided through background studies by MES);
- Centre for Development of the East Planning Region - established in 2007 and cooperative;
- Strong commitment by SECO in support of integrated water resource management of Bregalnica Watershed;
- NORGESVEL NGO actively supporting sustainable rural development;
- Existing environmental education initiatives in target area by SDC-funded OXO with potential to create synergies and to-be expanded in cooperation with REC.

3.2.2. Western Macedonian Green Belt

i) Description of Target Area

The proposed target area forms part of the western Macedonian Green Belt (Map 3.2.2.) The exact location of the target area has not been defined yet, pending a feasibility assessment. The proposed area would be one of the ecological corridor sections earmarked for future planning and sustainable development by MES and the MEPP.

The corridor sections under consideration are the numbered areas on Map 3.2.2.

- Pelister- Galicica- and Mavrovo NPs (Map # 1)
- Galicica NP and proposed Shar Mountain NP (Map # 2)
- Proposed Shar Mountain NP and Mavrovo NP (Map # 3)
- Mavrovo NP and proposed Jablanica NP (Map # 4)

The importance of ecological corridors as vital link between the designated and proposed national parks within the Western Green Belt cannot be emphasized enough. To date, no designated corridor exists in all of Macedonia although the significance of corridors for biodiversity conservation is widely acknowledged and corridors are flagged as part of the NATURA 2000 agenda. A holistic approach to the planning and management of an ecological corridor segment would be a novelty to Macedonia to be used as model for other corridor sections.

Map 3.2.2.: Corridor Sections of the Western Green Belt



ii) Rationale and Justification

- Target area is the recognized biodiversity “hotspot” of Macedonia;
- Target area covers the four largest and ecologically most important protected areas of Macedonia;
- Highly diversified ecosystems and high potential to establish new areas for protection;
- Excellent conditions to test ecological corridor concept;
- Perceived need for integrated spatial land use planning in support of contiguous green belt area;
- High potential for trans-boundary cooperation with Albania and Kosovo;
- Green Belt covers several "Emerald" sites;
- Major focus of international conservation interest in Macedonia and Balkan Region at large;
- Past, current and (future?) focus of international donor interest;
- Target area considered "Key" to large carnivore conservation in the Balkan Region;
- Existence of excellent biophysical data base for major parts of target area;
- Origin of critical micro-watersheds with feeder streams draining into Lakes Ohrid and Prespa.

iii) Enabling Framework Conditions

- Past, present and advanced involvement of several local and international NGOs and donors in nature conservation and integrated rural development projects (MES, UCODEP, Pro Natura, Euronature. KfW, SDC, UNDP/GEF, EU);
- MES involved in baseline studies in support of proposed Jablanica NP;
- Great interest by MEPP in support of establishing Shar Mountain NP;
- Large scale conservation project on Balkan Lynx also in trans-boundary context;
- Building on experience with multi-stakeholder planning and cooperation;
- Existence of numerous international partnerships in support of nature protection.
- Major international and national interest in developing Green Belt biological corridor linking existing and proposed protected areas along Macedonia's western border.

There are several sites within the western Green Belt currently under active planning and management:

- **Mavrovo NP:** Active management planning and infrastructure development with support by Italian government.
- **Galicica National Park:** Active management by appointed Public Institution, financially assisted by KfW;
- **Pelister National Park:** Active management by authorised Public Institution. Substantial past support by SDC;
- **Prespa/Ohrid Basin** (UNDP/GEF Project 'Integrated Ecosystem Management in the Transboundary Prespa Park Region' operates within the Prespa/Ohrid area involving Macedonia, Albania and Greece with components:
 - solid waste management services in the rural communities
 - Reducing environmental impacts of agriculture
 - Restoration of Golema Reka (river)
 - Integrated trans-boundary ecosystem management at Lake Prespa by Albania, Greece and Macedonia

Current initiatives and future plans by MES for selected target areas in the Green Belt further contribute to the enabling environment of a potential programme in this geographic region:

- Jablanica proposed NP under preparation by MES; pending proclamation;
- Link among the Balkan Green Belt and Lynx Conservation Programme in partnership with Albanian NGO "Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA)" with support by EURONATUR, KORA and IUCN Cat Specialist Group;
- Continuation of the initiative in other parts of Western-Macedonian mountain ridge (Shar Planina, Korab) and bio-corridors for the large carnivores (Ilinska and Plakenska Mt.).

3.3. Selecting Sub-Programmes and Priority Interventions

An attempt was made to let key stakeholders decide on the best suited Sub-Programmes and priority interventions at the wrap-up workshop held at the end of the Fact-finding Mission. The workshop served as an opportunity to present the preliminary findings of the appraisal mission and to jointly with the workshop participants brainstorm interventions suitable for the proposed Swiss support. A matrix approach was chosen to check interventions proposed by workshop participants for each of the two geographic areas against a list of criteria to be met in order for an intervention to qualify. The interventions were then rated according to their respective score (Annex 6).

The results proved to be of limited value, not fully meeting expectations. Although interventions were identified by the stakeholders and may all be of importance, not all may constitute key activities needed for the creation of the desired enabling environment. The list of interventions proposed by the stakeholders is complemented through interventions needed for a logically conclusive work programme which embraces the holistic approach for each of the proposed geographic target areas. The interventions address both direct contributions to nature conservation and contributions to creating an enabling environment for nature conservation. The majority of interventions suggested by the workshop participants apply to both proposed geographic target areas.

3.3.1. Emerging Programmes for Osogovo Mountain and Bregalnica Watershed

i) Programme Integrated Spatial Land-use Planning (ISLUP)

This intervention received consensual approval by workshop participants in full appreciation of the critical importance of ISLUP as basis for wise land use management independent of the geographic area chosen.

Integrated Spatial Land Use Planning on a national and regional level is the responsibility of the independent Agency for Spatial Planning (see Chapter 2.1.1., ii). On a sub-regional level which includes municipalities technical and financial support is needed for the production of spatial plans on an operational scale of 1:50,000 which currently do not exist. This offers an opportunity to focus on an open niche within a very important programme in urgent need of attention. A suitable contribution to this programme could also involve support to the compilation and provision of baseline data needed for the elaboration of biophysical map sheets culminating in the production of an ecological sensitivity map as a key instrument for economic planning to be compatible with sub-regional and local conservation objectives. The objectives of Integrated Spatial Land Use Planning are to:

- Reach an acceptable balance between conservation and development objectives;
- Ensure land use (and tenure) certainty that promotes investment and community stability;

- Create the opportunities for individuals, advocacy groups and local governments to participate in land use planning and to influence government land use decisions that affect them;
- Enhance the level of shared knowledge and understanding about land and resource use decisions and their implications;
- Support the delivery of land use and resource management initiatives as stipulated by the country's Environmental Action Plan, the Law on Nature, the Law on Water, Forestry Law etc.;
- Facilitate evaluation of on-the-ground development proposals, reducing resources required for assessing major projects, and simplifying approvals for new activities that may be proposed over time.

ISLUP is based on the production of clustered thematic map sheets in an operational scale of 1:50,000. The first cluster of maps deals with the biophysical environment of the target area providing baseline information on climate, geo-morphology (topographic contour map), aspect, geology, hydrology, soils, and flora and fauna. The biophysical map cluster is complemented through a seismic- (i.e., fault lines, tectonic hot spots, etc.), and an ecological sensitivity map indicating identified areas of biodiversity conservation importance and protection needs (also called "Conservation" Map).

The biophysical map layers are of special value to land and resource use planning with focus on a typically rural society with a large dependency on natural resources. The biophysical map layers provide essential baselines for the second thematic map cluster dealing with the socio-economic environment of the target area.

The second cluster of thematic map layers begins with information on demographics and the distribution of settlements in the target area. This is followed by a series of (partly narrated) map sheets on land tenure, actual land use with focus on the three key designated land use categories in the target area: (a) forest, (b) pasture land and hay meadows and (c) arable land. The latter are complemented through a detailed narrative with focus on policies and management guidelines to be developed for each of the three key land use categories. This is supplemented by a third cluster of map layers with focus on infrastructure and development scenarios. The consolidated information provided by the biophysical, demographic, and socio-economic map layers constitutes a powerful tool for responsible land- and resource -use planning while facilitating a harmonic and well synchronized development process for a target area in an effort to reach the over-arching goal of the consolidation of nature conservation and sustainable economic development.

It is recognized that ISLAP on a regional and sub-regional level is a very involved undertaking which would exceed the scope of potential SDC support. Nevertheless, support to specific components of ISLUP including capacity development may be an appropriate option. Of special interest in this context would also be support to the production of the ecological sensitivity/conservation map for the chosen geographical area.

An ISLUP proposal encompassing the Bregalnica Region (including part of the Osogovo Mountains) has been prepared by the Agency for Spatial Planning¹⁶. The proposal addresses the area of the upper- and part of the lower Bregalnica River Basin including the municipalities of Berovo, Pehchevo, Kochani, M.Kamenica, Vinica, Zrnovce, Propishtip, Cheshinovo – Obleshevo, Karbinci, Shtip, covering a total area of 3538,59 square km with a total population of 181,858.

The rather vague proposal at an estimated cost of EUR 1 million insufficiently addresses the need for local stakeholder participation in the planning process and would not provide the data needed for an operational scale working document.

It is apparent that although ISLUP is a recognized prerequisite for intelligent land use planning on a landscape-, water catchment-, or River Basin level a proper feasibility assessment is needed to identify a possible entry point for SDC support on which to build regarding other interventions within the same geographic area.

ii) Programme Bregalnica River Basin Management Plan

This potential Programme would build on and be complementary to the potential ISLUP Programme to be carried out in tandem. It would be an ideal fit for the planned SECO Bregalnica River Basin water project. Downstream water management interventions (water treatment and the provision of sustainable high quality potable water supply and water used for irrigation) equally require upstream watershed protection. Effective protection of important micro-watersheds and feeder-streams of the Bregalnica River will be provided through the on-going Osogovo Mountain conservation initiative. A successful synchronization of all three planned and on-going interventions would provide formidable synergies, especially if planned and implemented jointly with the benefiting municipalities and local stakeholders. A combined effort would prepare favourable framework conditions and make a significant contributions to effectively combating climate change and rural poverty in the target area.

iii) Identification of Ecologically Sensitive Areas

This constitutes a priority initiative suggested by the workshop participants. It involves the identification, designation and sustainable management of areas to be set aside for their conservation value in the Bregalnica upper watershed and river basin as required by the NATURA 2000 Agenda. This would also form a very important integral part of the ISLUP process, resulting in the ecological sensitivity map for the target area.

iiiv) Support to the creation of trans-boundary conservation areas

How to best support the current initiative aimed at the creation of a trans-boundary conservation area that effectively will protect more than 1000 square km of the highly diverse Osogovo Mountain ecosystems, have to be assessed through the follow-up feasibility study of this appraisal mission.

¹⁶ Agency for Spatial Planning. 2009. Proposal for Spatial Planning of the Bregalnica River Basin.

v) Need for regional rural development to built on on-going activities and lessons learnt

There is no doubt that sustainable rural development on a landscape level with focus on the rural poor and subsistence farmers will be highly beneficial to conservation objectives, significantly contributing to an enabling environment. Suitable interventions (i.e., agro-biodiversity, organic agriculture, improved livestock- and range management etc.) are key elements contributing to nature conservation in cultural landscapes which dominate Macedonia.

vi) Sustainable Waste Management (IPA funds)

This is another possible intervention proposed by the workshop participants for the target area. Proper waste management including recycling has to be addressed urgently, in particular in context with the numerous municipalities and communities still using active watersheds, creeks, and rivers for uncontrolled solid waste disposal. In this context the possibility of accessing IPA funds for co-financing should be investigated.

vii) Waste Water Management

Identified as a Key concern by the workshop participants this issue will be addressed in the target area for selected Municipalities by the proposed SECO Project. It will be complementary to all other proposed activities contributing to an enabling environment.

viii) Formalize Cooperation Agreement Amongst Key Actors in the Region

The need for better inter-agency and stakeholder cooperation has been acknowledged by the workshop participants, in particular the need for better collaboration with the Regional Planning Centres, the MEPP and MAFWE.

ix) Other issues of concern highlighted by the workshop participants include:

- Assessment of Natural Resources Use in the targeted watershed (Part of the River Basin Management Plan)
- Identification of Main Sources of Contamination Related to Water, Air, and Soil (Part of the River Basin Management Plan)
- Development of a Regional Disaster Response Plan addressing fire, flooding and chemical water contamination as a result of defective mine settling ponds (Possibly part of the River Basin Management Plan)

x) Environmental Awareness Campaign

This should build on the experience by OXO and REC regarding the highly successful SDC supported environmental Education Programme. It would be desirable to expand the existing Programme by addressing additional target groups with focus on the Bregalnica River Basin, creating valuable synergies and being complementary to other Swiss and NGO supported interventions in the target area.

xi) Sustainable Range Management and Land Rehabilitation

This should be part of integrated watershed management, the on-going trans-boundary conservation initiative involving large complexes of sub-alpine grassland ecosystems and the proposed River Basin Management Plan. The protection of upper water catchment areas which are subject to livestock grazing throughout the target area is of vital

importance to downstream communities. Range use policies as part of the ISLUP process and range management plans are important elements of the overall land use management planning initiatives.

3.3.2. Emerging Programmes for Corridor Section of Western Macedonian Green Belt

The following Programmes and interventions described in context with the Bregalnica River Basin/Osogovo Mountain Emerging Programmes equally apply to any of the corridor sections of the Eastern Green Belt as suggested by the workshop participants:

- Programme Integrated Spatial Land-use Planning (ISLUP);
- Identification of Ecologically Sensitive Areas;
- Support to the creation of trans-boundary conservation areas;
- Need for regional rural development to built on on-going activities and lessons learnt;
- Sustainable Waste Management (IPA funds);
- Waste Water Management;
- Sustainable Range Management and Land Rehabilitation;
- Environmental Awareness Campaign;
- Formalize Cooperation Agreement Amongst Key Actors in the target area;
- Other issues of concern highlighted by the workshop participants include:
 - Assessment of Natural Resources Use in Targeted Corridor Section;
 - Identification of Main Sources of Contamination Related to Water, Air, and Soil;
 - Development of a Regional Disaster Response Plan addressing fire, flooding and water contamination.

Additionally following initiatives have been highlighted by the workshop participants for priority attention applicable to any corridor section:

i) Protection of Riparian Vegetation

The ecological importance of riparian vegetation as a Key ecotone is undisputed. The role of riparian vegetation in cultural landscapes and in particular potential ecological corridors characterized by highly altered and fragmented ecosystems, is of even greater importance. These important ecotones have to be flagged as ecologically highly sensitive areas within the proposed conservation map (part of the ISLUP process).

ii) Programme on Forest Fire Management

Fire is widely recognized as a key agent in contributing to the dynamics of ecosystems. It is also vital to the maintenance of fire-dependent ecosystems (i.e., dry-land pine forests, savannahs etc.). Fires in cultural landscapes, however, especially when endangering highly fragmented and sensitive forests of great biodiversity importance, have to be managed and controlled/suppressed. The problem is expected to exacerbate with increasing effects of global warming (i.e., droughts and high temperatures in summer)

which already have been noted for Macedonia. This potential programme would be of great importance to the entire Green Belt of Macedonia.

iii) Sustainable Forest Management Inside/Outside PAs

This issue has to be addressed directly by the Forestry Sector of MAFWE which has the experience and competence to deal with the subject. The findings of the appraisal mission suggest that there is no pressing need for outside assistance.

3.3.4. Support to the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning

One of the Key priorities highlighted by the Sector of Nature Protection of the MEPP is the elaboration of the “National Strategy for Nature Conservation”, a requirement of the NATURA 2000 Agenda for Macedonia and a prerequisite for EU accession. The MEPP has struggled with this issue since 2004 without much progress made.

It is not recommended to spend the available SDC funds on a programme related solely to institutional strengthening on the central level. In view of the relative importance of the strategic document under discussion however it appears justified to provide some funds for the initiation of the process, not to finance the entire production of the document and the related background studies. It is recommended to provide financial support to the existing but non-functional Technical Committee entrusted with guiding the process. The Technical Committee has to agree on the components and the structure of the Strategic Plan first before the work can actually begin. It may also be considered to financially contribute to the compilation and processing of some baseline data needed for the plan. Some work components such as the inventory and re-assessment of the country's protected area system have been out-sourced to MES with financial support from the current UNDP/GEF project. The bulk of the work still remains to be done.

In this context it is not recommended to provide financial assistance to the production of the Red List and Red Data Book for Macedonia (i.e. endangered species) as suggested by MEPP. This would exceed the scope of available SDC funds which can be spend more effectively and efficiently working within the region and on the local level (i.e., grassroots oriented).

3.4. SDC-Supported Interventions related to Emerging Priority Programmes

Past SDC involvement in direct support of nature protection focused on Pelister National Park. The project was suspended in 2009 failing the MEPP's compliance with rules related to Governance. In general the success of the project is widely acknowledged, mostly as a result of grassroots oriented participatory management planning and sustainable economic development of communities dependent on the park's resources. The lessons learnt from Pelister are currently applied to the KfW-supported project Galicica National Park.

At current SDC has no active Programme in direct support of nature conservation. Indirect support assisting in the development of enabling framework conditions for nature conservation has been and continues to be the financial support of OXO in support of mainstreaming environmental education into elementary school curricula. This has been and continues to be a highly successful initiative which has received praise from the Government, the donor community, NGOs and the Private Sector alike. OXO works in close collaboration with REC which has been instrumental in developing innovative pedagogic toolkits applied by OXO. The project will be complementary to any programme initiative directly aimed at nature conservation and such contributing to enabling framework conditions.

The proposed SECO Programme on water management in the Bregalnica watershed is expected to contribute substantially to an enabling environment including nature conservation, especially if the protection of upper watersheds will also be addressed by the project. The SECO water project could also capitalize on the success of the SDC supported environmental education project generating favourable synergies.

SECTION 4. NEXT MILESTONES

The next Milestone will be for SDC to decide in favour of or against the proposed Programmes and Interventions. If the findings and recommendations from this Fact-finding Mission are accepted in principle, SDC will have to decide whether one or both of the geographic target areas proposed should become subject to the proposed feasibility study which would be the next milestone. Equally, SDC would be expected to decide which of the proposed Programmes and Interventions to include in the proposed feasibility assessment (see Annex 7).

The proposed Feasibility Study would commence with an in-depth field assessment of the framework conditions related to the two proposed geographic target areas supported through a comprehensive literature and document review. This would be followed by an analysis of baseline data collected during the field survey and the elaboration of the final feasibility assessment report. The field study involves the following steps:

- Identification and analysis of key stakeholders directly linked to the respective target area;
- Stakeholder discussions with focus on the proposed and possible alternative measures/interventions suitable for possible SDC funding under the proposed Umbrella Programme;
- Meetings with the Agency for Spatial Planning to discuss possible co-financing, collaboration, approach and work volume related to the proposed integrated spatial land use planning for the target area(s);
- Conducting a comprehensive threat analysis which identifies local drivers of biodiversity loss and barriers to nature conservation;
- Identification of mitigation measures suitable to effectively address root causes and imminent threats to nature conservation;

- Implementation of a rapid rural assessment and a socio-economic analysis in support of identifying interventions suitable to contribute to poverty alleviation, livelihood stabilization and enhancement of local living conditions (stabilizing rural population);
- Preliminary identification of ecologically sensitive areas in need of special protection (jointly with knowledgeable local stakeholders and NGOs such as MES);
- Proposal of suitable conservation management for identified areas in need of protection;
- Multi-stakeholder mid-term workshop to present preliminary findings and discuss proposed interventions;
- Final selection of most suitable geographic target area using objective rating matrix and professional judgement;
- Final selection of interventions for selected target area and elaboration of a corresponding profile for each proposed measure. The profiles should be structured as follows:
 - Rationale and justification
 - Description
 - Implementation and implementation responsibilities (suitable partner)
 - Duration
 - Budget estimate
- Identification of co-financing opportunities and partnerships for specific interventions;
- Identification and capability assessment of potential partners chosen for corresponding intervention;
- Preparation of result-oriented logframe matrix and overall budget.

SECTION 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The available SDC funding offers the unique opportunity to make a direct and indirect contribution to nature conservation in Macedonia in support of the country's efforts in meeting the rigid NATURA 2000 requirements, a prerequisite for its pending EU accession.

In the light of the overwhelming challenges facing Macedonia in all areas and on all levels -nature conservation not being an exception- it is not easy to identify the most appropriate Programme(s) suitable for SDC interventions that would maximize the benefits to biodiversity conservation and the country's society at large.

The authors of this report have opted for a holistic approach to nature conservation, best suited in view of existing framework conditions related to the institutional/legal-, and socio-cultural-economic climate. A holistic approach to nature conservation will allow for the consolidation of nature conservation and sustainable economic development and the creation of powerful synergies to be achieved through forming alliances and partnerships with donors, government agencies and the private sector.

Whichever programmes and interventions applied to one of the two (or both) proposed geographic areas, the chosen programs and interventions have to be feasible, practical, effective and have to result in visible and measurable benefits to nature conservation and sustainable development. It remains the challenge of the follow-up feasibility assessment to investigate the most fitting of all options and choices proposed in this report.

The overall Votum of the authors of this report is in favour of the Osogovo Mountain/Bregalnica watershed target area for the following reasons:

- The target area has not been subject to any donor support in the past;
- Stakeholders from the area have shown great interest in donor support and appear to be committed to the cause, providing donor assistance can be secured;
- The ecosystems of the target area are currently insufficiently represented by Macedonia's protected area system;
- The target area is ideally suited to test the proposed holistic approach to participatory integrated spatial land use planning;
- SDC support to nature conservation would be highly complementary to the planned SECO water project covering the major part of the target area;
- SECO support could be highly complementary to the on-going trans-boundary nature conservation efforts spear-headed by the Macedonian Ecological Society;
- An alliance with MES would be highly beneficial to any conservation activity in the target area;
- The proposed Integrated Spatial Land Use Planning could become a powerful tool for the improvement of inter-ministerial working relationship (MEPP and MAFWE);
- The joint SDC-SECO initiatives could forge sound cooperation with municipalities substantially contributing to environmental awareness building and capacity development in favour of nature conservation;
- SDC support could build on past and current experience of the Norwegian NGO Norgesvel providing excellent cooperation opportunities at grassroots level.
- The potential for sustainability of chosen interventions as Key exit strategy is high;

In brief, the target area Osogovo/Bregalnica appears to offer the best framework conditions of the two proposed geographic areas promising a win-win situation.

ANNEXES

- Annex 1: Terms of Reference for Fact-finding Mission**
- Annex 2: List of Persons Contacted**
- Annex 3: List of Workshop Participants**
- Annex 4: Stakeholder Analysis**
- Annex 5: NATURA 2000: Emerald sites in Macedonia to protect**
- Annex 6: Proposed Programme and Intervention Rating Matrix**

Annex 1: Terms of Reference for Fact-finding Mission

OBJECTIVE OF THE APPRAISAL MISSION

The overall objective of the Appraisal mandate is to analyse the current context and develop options (approx. three) on strategic level for SDC's intervention in the area of nature protection. Based on the recommendations of the consultants, SDC will decide whether to further develop one option, which might later be implemented with the assistance of an implementing agency.

The clear recommendations on possible interventions shall including following information:

- general scope of intervention;
- main objectives;
- potential impact and results;
- beneficiaries;
- potential partners
- synergies with National priorities, Swiss projects and/or other donors;
- strengths, risks and opportunities (SWOT analysis).

During the Appraisal mission, the Consultant Team shall specifically:

- analyze the context in the country including the definition of the most important
- drivers of biodiversity loss and degradation of ecosystems goods and services (in accordance with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, GEF);
- assess the capacity of the potential partners, i.e.: Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP): The MoEPP, and as integral part of it, the Administration for Environment and its Sector for Nature, in terms to its capacity and knowledge to assure effective enforcement of the laws, fulfilment of the EU requirements and other international treaties; Municipalities: In terms of their human capacities and technical and financial resources to become active in the field of nature protection. NGO: Assessing the capacities of the main NGO's active in the field of nature protection; Business sector: Identification of potential partners from the business sector who could be interested in participating in a joint Programmeme, as well as assessing possibilities of working with the business sector as a target group; General Public: Assessing possible synergies between potential areas of intervention in the field of nature protection, and SDC's new Programme on environmental education in all kindergarten, primary and secondary schools in Macedonia in academic year 2010/2011 as a compulsory lecturing, integrated in the existing curricula; International Community: Mainly those donors that are already active in the field of protection of nature: KfW (supporting the NP Galicica), Italian Embassy (supporting the NP Mavrovo), UNDP (supporting development of management plans for two protected areas, drafting secondary legislation etc);
- analyze the models for implementation of the proposed options;

- analyze activities within other Swiss funded projects possibly linked to nature protection (e.g. Environmental Education, public campaigns in area where water projects are active etc.);
- analyze activities of other donors.
- Special attention should be given to: national priorities and needs in view of the EU accession process; strategic objectives and approaches defined in the Cooperation Strategy Macedonia 2009-2012 for the sub-domain Protection of biodiversity; Swiss experience in the country and merits gained in the past; possible synergies with the ongoing and planned activities and Programmes of other Swiss funded projects and of other donors; Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness;
- effects of habitat change, climate change, invasive alien species, overexploitation, pollution and other global environmental problems (deforestation, waste etc), on the nature protection; possibilities for economic sustainable use and development of the nature resources (economic valuation of ecosystem services), especially through involvement of the local population and making the value of natural capital visible to Macedonian economy and society.

PRINCIPLES OF FUTURE PROGRAMME

- Reference frame budget for SDC intervention in nature preservation is about CHF 2.0 mio until end of 2012;• Programme implementing time frame: 3 - 7 years;
- Consideration of SDC's cross-cutting themes: gender and good governance;
- Alignment, complementarity and potential of synergies with Macedonian government's efforts and other donors' initiatives;
- Consideration of Institutional support, if feasible, in order to promote institutional sustainability of partners;
- Western Balkans Regional approach in order to seek opportunities for cross-border activities, if appropriate.

METHODOLOGY

Several steps will be needed to execute this mandate:

A desk study, a mission to Macedonia, including briefing/debriefing with the Swiss Cooperation Office (SCO), and stakeholder face-to-face interviews. Meetings/interviews will have to be conducted with representatives of the following stakeholders:

- Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP) and the Administration for Environment within the MoEPP;
- Representatives of the Public Institutions for National Parks Mavrovo/Galicica;
- Other donors active in the area of protection of biodiversity (KfW, Italian Embassy, UNOP, GEF Small Grants Programme etc);
- Representatives of city of Skopje on activities on protection of the reserve Canyon Matka;
- NGO's active in the area of nature protection;

- Representatives of the scientific community;
- Interviews with other relevant stakeholders (detailed list will be provided by the SCO).
- Report writing and finalising.

DELIVERABLES

The Consultant Team shall deliver a draft Appraisal Mission report on findings and recommendation for possible options for intervention in the area of nature protection, including a) context and b) recommendations on possible interventions. The length of the draft report shall be maximum 30 pages (plus annexes). The draft Appraisal mission report shall be submitted 15 days after the end of the mission and discussed with the SCO Skopje and the SDC HQ.

Final Appraisal mission report shall incorporate the comments of the SCO and the SDC HQ. The final Appraisal mission report shall be submitted not later than 10 days after reception of the comments of the SCO and the SDC HQ.

Annex 2: List of Persons Contacted

Date	NAME	INSTITUTION	TITLE	CONTACT
22-Feb	Tatjana von Steiger Weber	Swiss Cooperation Office Macedonia- SCO	Head of Cooperation	tatjana.vonsteigerweber@sdc.net
23-Feb	Filip Ivanov	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP)	Director of the Administration of Environment	f.ivanov@moepp.gov.mk
	Vasko Atanasov	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP)	Head of Department on Nature Protection/ Administration of Environment	v.atanasov@moepp.gov.mk
	Sasko Jordanov	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP)	Head of Unit	s.jordanov@moepp.gov.mk
	Anita Kodzoman	UNDP	Programme Officer Head of Environment Practice	anita.kodzoman@undp.org
	Toni Popovski	UNDP	Project Manager	toni.popovski@undp.org
	Michael R Appleton	Consultant Company- Conservation, sustainable development, project management	Adviser	mrappleton@gmail.com
24-Feb	Petar Georgiev	KfW	Office Director	petar.gjorgjiev@kfw.de
	Natasha Radovanovic	KfW	Programme Officer	
	Daniele Pedretti	UCODEP-International Cooperation South East Europe Office	Project Coordinator	daniele.pedretti@ucodep.org
	Aleksandar Nikolovski	NGO-FAGRICOM	President	aleksandar.nikolovski@fagricom.org.mk
	Daniela Buzarovska	NGO-FAGRICOM	Project Coordinator	daniela.buzarovska@fagricom.org.mk
25-Feb	Cvetanka Ikonomova	City of Skopje	Head of Department of Environment	cvetanka.ikonomova@skopje.gov.mk
	Lovren Markic	City of Skopje	Head of Department for International Cooperation and Cooperation with NGO's and Foundations	lovren.markic@skopje.gov.mk
	Dimce Smilev	City of Skopje	Head of Unit for Tourism	dimce.smilev@skopje.gov.mk
	Zlatko Samardziev	GEF Small Grants Programme	National Coordinator	info@gefsgpmacedonia.org.mk
	Teodora Andreeva	EU Delegation	Environment Department	
	Nikoleta Bogatinovska	GTZ	Project Coordinator	nikoleta.bogatinovska@gtz.de

26-Feb	Prof.Dr.Ljubco Melovski	NGO -MES Macedonian Ecological Society	Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics/ Institute of Biology- University Professor	melovski@iunona.pmf.ukim.edu.mk
	Metodija Veleviski	NGO -MES Macedonian Ecological Society	Direktor/Project Coordinator	velevski@mes.org.mk
	Dr.Slavco Hristovski	NGO -MES Macedonian Ecological Society	Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics/ Institute of Biology- Assistant Professor	slavco_h@pmf.ukim.mk
	M.Sc.Marijana Milevska	PREDA- Pelagonia Development Agency	Executive Director	marijana.milevska@preda.org.mk
28-Feb	Asbjorn Garnes	Norgesvel		
	Dusko Aleksovski	Municipality of Kriva Palanka	LER-Local Economic Development Center	
1-Mar	Jakuposki Oner	National Park "Mavrovo"	Director	oner.jakuposki@gmail.com
	Mukrem Mehmedi	Municipality of Mavrovo & Rostuse	Mayor	
	Til Dieterich	GFA Consulting Group & KfW	Team Leader of the Project "Support to Galicica National Park"	til.dieterich@web.de
	Oliver Avramovski	National Park "Galicica"	Consultant	oliver.avramovski@gmail.com
2-Mar	Slavko Dameski	APOLO2	Former Director of NP Pelister/ Consultant	s.dameski@yahoo.com
3-Mar	Violeta Drakuleska	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP)	Head of Department for Physical Planning	v.drakuleska@moepp.gov.mk
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	Ana Petrovska	Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe -REC	Project Coordinator	ana@rec.org.mk
	Katerina Stojkovska	Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe -REC	Country Director Country Office Macedonia	katerina@rec.org.mk
	Vojo Gogovski	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy	State Counselor for Forestry and Hunting	vojo.gogovski@mzsv.gov.mk

Annex 3: List of Workshop Participants

No	NAME	INSTITUTION	E-mail CONTACT
1	Smiljka Teneva	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP)	smiljkateneva@yahoo.com
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Annex 4: Stakeholder Analysis

Government Agencies

i) Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP)

The MEPP is the key Government Institution responsible for all matters related to the environment and nature conservation. The Ministry's administrative entity: "Administration of Environment" (see Figure) reports to the Deputy Minister of Environment. It is composed of four "Sectors" (i.e., Water, Nature Protection, IPPC and Risk Management, and Environmental Protection). The Sector on Nature Protection is composed of three "Units" (i.e., Natural Heritage, Geological Heritage, and Biodiversity). The "Administration of the Environment" entity is supported by eight generic sectors reporting to the State Secretary. Two of the eight generic Sectors most relevant to the specific Sector of Nature Protection include the Geographic Information Sector (GIS) and the Sector of Spatial Planning. The State Inspectorate of the Environment responsible for environmental law enforcement is a separate entity equally reporting to the State Secretary. For further detail regarding the administrative structure, functions, responsibilities, and capacity of the MEPP it is referred to the very comprehensive analysis by Appleton¹.

- **Sector on Nature Protection:** There is wide-spread consensus, supported by Appleton's findings, that the MEPP's Sector on Nature Protection is under-staffed under-budgeted, and insufficiently qualified to deal with its very complex portfolio. The current staff consists of one Department Head, five persons linked to the Natural Heritage Unit, 3 persons to the Biodiversity Unit, and 2 persons to the Geological Heritage Unit. The state budget has no budget line specifically allocated to biodiversity conservation. Although the MEPP is fully responsible for the legal framework and designation of protected areas no core funding is available for the country's protected area system. For details regarding the institutional analysis it is referred to Appleton².

Key issues identified by the Sector staff to be addressed on a priority basis are:

- Elaboration of a National Strategy for Nature Conservation, a Key requirement by the EU Commission on the Environment;
- Assessment and re-proclamation of designated protected areas/sites to be finished in accordance with the Law by 2013;
- Elaboration of a Red List for Flora and Fauna and the Red Data Book.

¹ Appleton M.R. 2008. Protected Areas in Macedonia: An Overview. UNDP archives Skopje.

² Appleton M.R. 2008. UNDP-GEF/MoEPP, 2008. PIMS 3728: Strengthening the Ecological, Institutional and Financial sustainability of Macedonia's Protected Area system. Protected Areas in Macedonia: Institutional Options. UNDP archives Skopje.

Fig 2.1.1: The Sector “ Administration of the Environment” of the MEPP

Administration for the Environment

Environment Section	Nature Protection Section	Water Section	Industrial pollution and risk management Section
EIA	Natural Heritage and Protected Areas	Water planning and management	Integrated pollution control
Soils and Waste	Geodiversity	Interdividual collaboration	Chemical and industrial disasters
Laboratory	Biodiversity	Protection of Ohrid Lake	Risk management and atmosphere
Documentation			Monitoring

- **Sectors on Spatial Planning and GIS:** As part of the MEPP this Sector works under the Law on Spatial Planning. The Sector develops Programmes for the production of annual spatial planning to be implemented by the Agency for Spatial Planning, an independent agency. The MEPP is responsible for developing the process only, not the elaboration and implementation of the actual plans. Spatial planning responsibilities of the MEPP cover the country’s eight administrative regions, municipalities and national parks. Until present the Sector operates on its own without involving the newly created Regional Economic Development Agencies (REDA) a part of the municipal structures. Recognized shortcomings of the Sectors of Spatial Planning and GIS are:
 - No standards set for compilation of baseline data to be supplied by different institutions in preparation of spatial planning. This results in significant variation in data quality.
 - Undefined working scales.
 - Incompatibility with EU standards and stipulations.
 - Lacking formal inter-institutional agreements.
 - Poor inter-agency communication.

ii) Agency for Spatial Planning

This independent, quasi private institution operates under the “Law on the Implementation of Spatial Planning”, serving the MEPP and the Ministry of Transport and Communication. Official work-load permitting, the Agency may accept private

contracts for spatial planning purposes. This Agency is also fully responsible for spatial planning of national parks, a rather odd arrangement, and seemingly uniquely applied to Macedonia. Commonly referred to as “zoning” in context with national park planning elsewhere in the world, a possible explanation for the special arrangement in Macedonia involving two NP planning entities could simply be misnomer, namely the wrong designation of a multiple use area now called “National Park”.

Macedonia’s three national parks are an integral part of cultural landscapes formed and influenced by man. As such the three national parks actually do not qualify to be designated national parks in accordance with the IUCN classification for protected areas. Judging by their multiple use character, the three areas more resemble IUCN categories 4 and 5 (Multiple Use Areas, Protected Landscapes). The three parks contain villages, and allowing resource- and land use mostly not compatible with the rather strict biodiversity conservation objectives of a national park in accordance with the IUCN definition. Category 4 and 5 protected areas would require integrated spatial land use planning due to overlapping legal mandates and legislation, a service offered by the Agency for Spatial Planning. A National Park with overriding biodiversity protection objectives on the other hand requires planning services of ecologists only.

The Agency for Spatial Planning has its own GIS System. Cooperation between the Agency’s GIS Unit and MEPP’s GIS Sector appears to be poor.

iii) Mavrovo National Park and the Union Cooperative for the Development of People (UCODEP), Italy

Located within the designated Western Green Belt of Macedonia, Mavrovo National Park with an area of 73,000 ha is the largest and possibly most unaltered conservation area in Macedonia. The park covers the south eastern part of the Sar Planina Mountains, a larger part of the Bistra system, and the entire Korab e Desat Mountain Ridge forming the international boundary with Albania. Mavrovo was first proclaimed as a “protected zone” in 1949 (11,750 ha), expanding to 72,000 ha when it was proclaimed national park in 1952. The Municipality Mavrovo is entirely located inside the NP which also accommodates a privately owned and operated ski resort. The park is financially supported by the Italian Government with focus on the participatory development of a management plan and the establishment of the park’s infrastructure. The process is facilitated by the Italian NGO UCODEP on behalf of the Italian Government. The Municipality Mavrovo (population 9800) is composed of 33 villages, all located inside the NP. The Municipality is an active partner in the management planning process of the park expecting to be a prime beneficiary of the proposed tourism development. In spite of being an active partner in the planning process, the Municipality Mavrovo is not represented on the National Park Management Board, and neither is the Private Sector represented in spite of its strong presence inside the NP (ski resort, Hydro dam etc.).

The park employs a staff of 70 persons of whom 25% are seasonal. In a self-assessment of park staff the need for capacity development of all NP staff and the need for awareness raising of villages inside the NP is indicated.

Overlapping authorities between the MEPP and MAFWE are the most serious problem cited by the NP administration. 35% of the NP is composed of sub-alpine pasture land which falls under the management authority of MAFWE. The NP administration wants full responsibility for all land and resources inside the park in an effort to generate sufficient revenue to cover its operational costs. Un-resolved land tenure issues are cited as another serious concern.

The NP has developed favourable trans-boundary contacts with neighbouring Albania and Kosovo which are expected to eventually result in formal cooperation agreements regarding trans-boundary nature conservation.

iv) Pelister National Park Administration

Pelister National Park is the first NP in Macedonia, proclaimed in 1948, one year prior to the proclamation of Mavrovo Protected Area. It currently is the only NP and protected area in Macedonia with a finished management plan and a complementary business plan. The participatory multi-stakeholder elaboration of the two documents and the infrastructure development of the NP have been fully financed by SDC which has supported the NP development since the year 2000. The Swiss-funded project is widely considered successful in spite of its current problems which led to a suspension of Swiss aid following a review in 2009.

The development phases of SDC project support have been well documented with no need for further discussion. The main reason for suspending support to the NP is related to the continuing failure of the MEPP to provide representation on the Park's Management Board. According to the former director³ of Pelister NP, the Management Board is allegedly directly linked to the allegedly illegal logging activities which allegedly take place inside the NP. According to this source illegal logging appears to significantly exceed the annual allowable cut approved by the Forestry Department of the MAFWE. Furthermore, the Management Board allegedly does not implement the management plan and does not comply with the policies elaborated jointly with local stakeholders during the planning process. The cooperation with local stakeholders appears to have deteriorated causing local resentment of the NP Board and park administration. As described for Mavrovo, un-resolved land tenure issues continue to cause problems inside the NP. The NP generates its revenue from logging inside the NP, and the sale of minor forest products.

v) Galicica National Park Administration

The development of Galicica National Park is financially supported by German bilateral aid since 2008. The project, with focus on the participatory elaboration of a park management plan and supporting business plan and infrastructure development, is linked to the on-going UNDP/GEF -implemented trans-boundary biodiversity conservation project involving Albania, Macedonia and Greece. Other focal areas of German bilateral aid related to Galicica NP are environmental education, tourism infrastructure development, establishment of an environmental monitoring system, and sustainable

³ Slavko Dameskii, 2nd of March 2010, pers. comm..

resource use inside the NP with focus on firewood production and minor forest products. German financial support is 1.5 Mio EUR with a timeline of three years (2008-2011). According to current park planners⁴ one of the most serious problems related to the three designated NPs is the current lack of ecological connectivity. Linking the three existing national parks through a well planned ecological corridor is considered one of the key priorities of the country's Western Green Belt shared with Albania and Kosovo.

Almost half of the 25, 000 ha NP is covered by forest in different successional stages of which 4,000 ha are actively managed. All revenues generated by the NP are retained in full to cover 85% of the park's operational costs (EUR 400,000/a).

As in Pelister and Movrovo NPs the MEPP also has failed so far to provide its mandatory two persons representation on the NP's Management Board. This is little understood since all expenses related to the Ministry's participation would be paid by the NP and not the Ministry.

As described for Pelister and Mavrovo national parks Galicica also faces serious unresolved land tenure issues mostly related to the planned ski resort and recreational housing development along its borders. Other problems mentioned by the park planner are related to the generally poorly qualified NP personnel.

The Western Green Belt of Macedonia as part of the EU Natura 2000 agenda, is composed of the Pelister NP (17,000 ha), Ezeri PA (1000 ha), Galicica NP (25,000 ha), proposed Yablanica NP (18,000 ha), Movrovo NP (73,000 ha) and proposed Sharplanina NP (45,000 ha). Identified bio-corridors cover the Ilinska and Plakinska Mountain Ranges to connect Pelister and Mavrovo NPs.

vi) Ministry of Agriculture, Forests, Water and Water Resources (MAFWE): Forestry Department

The two public enterprises as part of MAFWE: "Macedonian Forests" and "Public Enterprise for Pastures" are responsible for policy development, regulation and management of the resources under their respective mandate.

The continuing and openly acknowledged lack of cooperation and communication between the MEPP and the MAFWE appear to be the direct result of competing authorities over land and resources, especially with respect to proclaimed protected areas (i.e., National Parks). Traditionally the Forestry Department of MAFWE has been the ultimate authority on forest management and hunting/wildlife management in the country; likewise, the Agriculture Sector has been responsible for pasture management, in particular the management of high elevation pastures located above the timberline. Both, forests and high elevation grasslands happen to be prominent features of high biodiversity value in the country's proclaimed and proposed national parks which fall under the authority of the MEPP. This appears to be the root cause of the major disagreements and lack of cooperation between the two Line Ministries.

⁴ Oliver Avramoski, March 2nd 2010, pers. comm./

It appears that in the past protected areas have been selected and proclaimed with little consultation/participation of the agencies directly responsible for the sustainable resource management in these areas. In accordance with the Law on Nature the management authority for national parks and their resources is the mandate of independent area-specific Management under the umbrella of the MEPP. A key concern of the Forestry Department of MAFWE is that Management Boards and park staff may not have the expertise and qualifications needed for the sustainable forest management which requires professional foresters. Although the MAFWE continues to be responsible for the approval of forest management plans inside national parks, it has no jurisdiction over the implementation of the plans, the responsibility of the respective NP Management Board. This dilemma equally applies to grazing land located inside national parks.

The lack of cooperation between the two Ministries may escalate further with the approval and proclamation of new national parks as planned for the Green Belt of Macedonia (i.e. Shar Mountain; Jablanica) if the MAFWE continues to be left out of the planning, development and implementation process of national parks.

In view of the vital role of MAFWE related to nature conservation in the country a concerted effort should be made for the improvement of its working relations with the MEPP in order to improve the enabling environment for sustainable nature conservation. At current important synergies are being lost. To achieve a better relationship, the joint planning of the two Line Ministries spear-heading the proposed integrated spatial land use planning process of designated ecological corridors could provide an ideal opportunity for improved cooperation bringing the two Ministries closer together.

Regional and Local Agencies

i) City of Skopje

The City of Skopje serves as an example of how the Law on Local Self-Government (2002) applies to Municipalities in Macedonia. The Law effectively provides full authority to a Municipality to manage protected areas under its domain. The Law requires Municipalities to develop competence and expertise in environmental management and sustainable nature conservation and to elaborate and implement Local Environmental Action Plans (LEAPs) in accordance with the Second National Environmental Action Plan. Municipalities are also required by Law to be represented on National Park Management Boards of parks located within the administrative boundaries of a Municipality. In reality, however, it appears that in view of many other priorities only few Municipalities take advantage of the opportunity to get involved in nature conservation issues⁵.

⁵ Appleton M.R. 2008. Protected Areas in Macedonia: An Overview. UNDP archives Skopje.

The City of Skopje is responsible for the management of three designated protected areas:

- Natural Monument Matka (5000 ha), equivalent of IUCN category 3
- Vodno Forest Park (6500 ha), equivalent of IUCN category 6
- Gazibaba (unspecified protection status)

Part of the City's administrative structure is the Department responsible for "green space" including the three designated protected areas.

Center to the Natural Monument Matka is the Matka Canyon flooded by a hydro-dam. The area is known for its high biodiversity and recreational values. It is managed for tourism and biodiversity conservation in close cooperation with the local NGOs PEONI and FAGRICOM which have been provided management authority for the area.

Vodno Forest Park is managed for recreation, biodiversity conservation and forest protection (i.e., the forest is not commercially utilized) by the City. Gazibaba is managed for recreation and protection against adverse impacts from the nearby smelter facilities.

The City of Skopje covers the operational cost for the City's green space including the three protected sites largely through revenues generated from potable water sold to its citizens. 22% of the revenue generated through water enters the City budget for "green space". Additional funds used for green spaces and tourism development are generated from tourism taxes.

ii) Regional Economic Development Agency (RED) Municipality Kiva Palanca

The Municipality of Kiva Palanca may serve as a typical example of how the Law on Local Self-Government (2002) relates to Municipalities. The Municipality is located at the northern foothills of the Osogovo Mountain. The Municipality is composed of 33 villages. The population is 21,000 of which 5,000 people live in the widely scattered and isolated villages. The City administration has no special expertise and no programme related to the environment and nature protection. At current there are no protected areas located in the vicinity of the Municipality and no areas are earmarked for protection. This scenario appears typical for the average Macedonian municipality.

The Key task of the local RED office is economic development planning. Any reference to environmental management and need for nature protection is missing in the working documents of the Municipality.

International Organizations and Bilateral Donors

International organizations and bilateral donor agencies continue to play a key role in the areas of environmental protection and nature conservation in Macedonia. It may safely be assumed that without donor assistance and in spite of the general "hype" created in the country related to the pending candidacy of its EU accession, both sectors environment and biodiversity conservation would receive little attention and support by the Government. It has been suggested by stakeholders interviewed for this assignment

believed that international donors will continue to withdraw their support in view of IPA funding becoming available in preparation of EU accession and in support of Macedonia's efforts to meet EU environmental/biodiversity conservation standards prior to receiving full membership.

All major strategic documents developed in the realm of environment, climate change, nature protection and corresponding frame-laws have been financed by international organizations, bilateral donors, most important through GEF grants.

At current the only international aid agencies involved in the Environmental and Green Sectors in Macedonia are in ascending order of importance KfW, GTZ, SDC, and to a much lesser extent the Austrian and Italian Governments. USAID, as a past stout supporter of the environmental agenda is currently in the process of formulating a new Programme for Macedonia. GEF grants with projects implemented by UNDP are still instrumental in the overall environmental and biodiversity conservation efforts. Current donor projects in direct support of nature conservation focus on the three proclaimed national parks all located in the western part of Macedonia's designated Green Belt. Efforts in environmental management focus on water supply, waste water management and river basin protection.

Donor agencies have no management authority for protected areas in Macedonia. As pointed out by Appleton⁶ donor support of protected areas however has enabled PA management authorities to comply with their responsibility for site management. PA protection efforts are significantly more effective and efficient than in areas without donor support.

i) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/GEF

UNDP in Macedonia provides support to the Government through its current Programme activities in the following flagship areas: Democratic Governance, Social Inclusion, Environmental Protection, Gender Equality and Aid-Coordination in support of the Government in reaching the Millennium Development Goals. UNDP is the only implementing agency of GEF funds active in Macedonia, closely linked to the MEPP as key counterpart agency.

Projects currently being implemented by UNDP in the area of nature conservation and biodiversity protection are:

- UNDP/GEF: Integrated trans-boundary ecosystem management involving Macedonia, Albania and Greece;
- UNDP/GEF Medium-Size Project (MSP) Strengthening the Ecological, Institutional and Financial sustainability of Macedonia's Protected Area system (in progress ending in 2010).

⁶ IBID

ii) Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP)

GEF's Small Grants Programme supports activities of NGOs, and community-based (CBOs) organizations in the five focal areas of:

- conservation of biodiversity
- conservation of international waters
- climate change
- prevention of land degradation
- reduction of the impact of Persistent Organic Pollutants

The SGP is operating decentralized with an office in most qualifying recipient countries. The SGP Office in Macedonia has 2 employees. It collaborates with the MEPP Focal Point. Total funding available under the SGP is \$ 150,000/a under GEF Operational Programme 5. Grant application is considered people oriented, transparent and democratic. SGP grants enable local communities and stakeholders to independently implement small-scale environment- and community-oriented projects in the five focal areas.

Three grants have been provided in recent years related to biodiversity conservation in Macedonia:

- Bat protection (grant recipient PEONI)
- Protection of relic fir tree species (grant recipient: NGO UTRO jointly with local community)
- Ohrid water lily protection (grant recipient: Macedonian Ecological Society)

iii) European Union (EU) Commission on the Environment

The EU Commission Macedonia has no on-going activities in the sector of biodiversity- and nature conservation in the country. A "compliance check" with EU standards and a brief need assessment related to the biodiversity- and nature conservation sector was implemented in 2009 on behalf of the EU Commission. The outcome highlighted the following main barriers to overcome in order to meet NATURA 2000 requirements:

- shortcomings in the Law on Nature
- insufficient law enforcement as a result of insufficient and poorly qualified staff, and inadequate capacity to implement the legislation
- **No national strategy and action plan for nature protection in place**

In March 2010 the EU will start a technical support service to the MEPP with a time-line of 20 months aimed at the implementation of the existing legislation in compliance with the NATURA 2000 requirements. The EU relies on the still valid findings of the UNDP/GEF-financed Government self-assessment directives which provide a list of actions to be completed by priority and in chronological order, aimed at achieving the NATURA 2000 goals in a timely fashion. The document is used by the EU Commission as a "checklist" for progress made.

iv) Kreditanstalt fuer Wiederaufbau (KfW) German Bank for Reconstruction and Development

KfW's mission to Macedonia is the promotion of sustainable development, support to the transition process and assistance in approaching the EU. Since Macedonia's independence the German Government has provided more than 120 million EUR with funds mostly allocated to the areas of water supply, waste water treatment and environmental protection. Large-scale investments have been directed to the maintenance of the ecological integrity of Lakes Ohrid and Prespa.

Current focal areas of German Bilateral Aid are:

- Environmental protection (water supply and waste water treatment)
- Sustainable energy
- Sustainable development

Biodiversity conservation is not one of KfW's focal areas, although support is currently provided to Galicica National Park (see Chapter 2.1.1, V) with a grant of 1.5 Mio EUR allocated to the development of a management plan and business plan for the park and basic infrastructure development. The grant is listed as co-financing of the current UNDP/GEF implemented trans-boundary integrated ecosystem management project. According to the KfW's country representative no follow-up to the current biodiversity sector activities are planned.

v) Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)

Although GTZ is currently not directly involved in the Sector of Biodiversity and Nature Conservation it continues to provide technical assistance to the MEPP's Water Section created in 2008. This also originally implied support to the proposed transfer of technical personnel from the MAFWE to the MEPP in an effort to create one single agency responsible for water resources in the country.

The overall goal of the GTZ water project had been to assist in the capacity development of water resource management within one consolidated single agency under the umbrella of the MEPP. This however has not been realized. Legal mandates for different aspects of water resources continue to be divided between different Ministries. GTZ therefore has shifted its efforts towards the establishment of an inter-ministerial working group to jointly deal with water management issues, involving the MEPP, Ministry of Health (water quality), Ministry of Transport (water distribution), the Hydrological Institute and MAFWE (irrigation). MAFWE has chosen not to take part in a joint working group. The political will to form a functioning group is lacking. This continues to be a serious problem preventing the creation of valuable synergies. This also prevents the much needed creation of one single consolidated data base. The new Water Law (2009, article 219) stipulates the creation of a "National Council for Water". This Council has been formed, but it is not operational yet.

Part of GTZ assistance is directed to the water permit system on a regional and local level including water extraction permits in accordance with EU standards.

It appears that the current cooperation between donors involved in water issues in Macedonia needs improvement (i.e., KfW, SDC, USAID, and the World Bank).

International NGOs and National NGOs

It is interesting to note that none of the larger International Nature Conservation NGOs such as the World-wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN), Conservation International (CI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), World Conservation Society (WCS), etc. are involved in Macedonia.

Several smaller-sized Europe-based NGOs are active in Macedonia, mostly co-financing and supporting efforts by local NGOs related to species-specific and broader-scoped nature conservation projects. The German NGOs “Euronature” and “Frankfurter Zoological Society” are the better known, closely cooperating with the “Macedonian Ecological Society” (MES). The Swiss-based NGO “Pro- Natura” continues its long-standing support mostly in collaboration with local NGOs such as MES.

i) Regional Environmental Center (REC)

The Regional Environmental Center (REC) was created in 1991 by the EU with Headquarters in Budapest. The main purpose of REC was to assist in strengthening the civil society in transitional countries, with assistance provided especially in the area of environmental protection. The EU Commission on the Environment financed the establishment of REC country offices in all 17 Eastern Europe member states.

REC is a project-based independent organization and not part of the EU structure. It has a permanent staff of 200, with 7 permanent staff members located in the Macedonia office. Focal areas in Macedonia are the sectors of energy, water and waste management. REC collaborates with different Ministries but operates primarily on the Municipal and local level. REC Macedonia is actively involved in the elaboration of the environmental action plan and strategy, leading and managing the process on behalf of the EU with co-financing from the Austrian Government.

REC’s current work in Macedonia concentrates on waste management, environmental education and assistance to Municipalities in developing Environmental Action Plans (LEAP). The project on waste management centers on concession arrangements related to waste management. The project is financially supported by the Italian Government.

REC continues to play a key role in Macedonia in the area of environmental education mainstreaming environmental education into curricula of elementary schools in close cooperation with MEPP and the Ministry of Education. In 2009 REC started a new educational project named “Green Pack” aimed at teachers and young children with didactic focus on sustainable development. REC works in partnership with the local NGO OXO which has implemented a highly successful educational project funded by SDC.

ii) Norwegian Royal Society for Development (NORGESVEL)

NORGEVEL may well be considered one of the oldest NGOs in the World. The NGO was founded more than 200 years ago as a present to the Danish King. Its mission is sustainable rural development with activities aimed at the rural poor. It is a self-financed Norwegian-based NGO. Its activities in Macedonia focus on the Osogovo Mountains where it has successfully developed rural cooperatives mainly for the production of seed potatoes. Its holistic approach to sustainable rural development and stabilization of village livelihoods address value chains related to cash crops and livestock (dairy sector and stock improvement), soil classification, village-based tourism development, capacity development, environmental awareness building and the establishment of a micro-financing system to benefit the rural poor. NORGESVEL collaborates with the Agricultural Faculty of Shtip University, MAFWE, FAO and the Macedonian NGO FEGRICOM. Its local base is located in the Municipality Kiva Palanka. Its annual budget is EUR 300,000. Activities in the region started in 2002 ending in 2013. The grassroots oriented approach by NORGESVEL is well accepted by local communities where the NGO is held in high esteem.

vi) FAGRICOM and Pelagonia Regional Development Area (PREDA)

The local NGO FAGRICOM was founded as a follow-up to agricultural and forestry related projects by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Macedonia in 2005. Funded by USAID, the City of Skopje, the Norwegian Government, Small GEF grants and FAO, FAGRICOM (six employees) provides technical assistance on demand in the areas of forestry and agriculture. It is the only Macedonian NGO actively involved in policy development on a state level, mainly linked to the Forestry Sector of the MAFWE. On behalf of the City of Skopje FAGRICOM is involved in the management of the Matka Gorge Natural Monument engaged in the development of tourism and tourism-related infrastructure.

v) Macedonian Ecological Society (MES)

The Macedonian Ecological Society was founded in 1972 on the initiative of Macedonian ecologists concerned about nature conservation in the country. Since its early creation MES has been instrumental in shaping the country's biodiversity and nature conservation agenda. All of its 150 members are related to Academia and dedicated to auto-ecological and syn-ecological research. MES supports a full-time staff of eight biodiversity related specialists and four part-time specialists.

MES is undoubtedly considered the most important and competent NGO in Macedonia related to nature conservation and biodiversity protection, serving as key partner to the international donor community and NGOs. MES has organized several international congresses on ecology in former Yugoslavia and in Macedonia, and is the publisher of a Journal on Ecology.

MES is currently involved in the following major projects:

- **Establishment of a National Ecological Network in Macedonia (MAK-NEN)** as part of the Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN). PEEN is an ecological

- network initiative at the Pan-European level, endorsed by 54 European Ministers of Environment. MAK-MEN focusses mainly on the establishment of ecological corridors connecting key designated protected areas of the country.
- **Establishment of proposed Jablanica National Park**. MES is the driving force for the creation of the park which is expected to protect ecologically highly important mountain ecosystems as part of the country's western Green Belt, straddling the international border with Albania. Jablanica is widely considered a vital link in the in-complete protected area system of Macedonia and a vital stepping stone of the Green Belt. The project started in 2005 in partnership with the German-based NGO Euronature.
 - **Establishment of a trans-frontier conservation area** (proposed 1500 square km) in the Osogovo Mountains shared by Macedonia (two thirds) and Bulgaria (one third). The work is made possible through cooperation with the Frankfurter Zoological Society and Pro-Natura, eight Municipalities of Macedonia and Bulgaria, the "Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation", a Bulgarian-based NGO founded with the assistance of SDC, and the Macedonian NGO RNR-Nova (founded with assistance of SDC for public awareness building and environmental education related to Pelister National Park). The proposed area will protect diverse high elevation ecosystems and major upper watersheds on both sides of the international border including feeder streams of the Bregalnica hydrological system. The project is in an advanced stage with most of the base-line data collection phase completed. The framework conditions for a successful project are considered favourable.
 - **Large-scale project on vultures** with major support from the EU and Birdlife International. The very successful project which has created wide-spread international interest focused on general awareness building aimed at key target groups such as shepherds and livestock owners. Vultures are a key indicator species of intact landscapes and therefore a critical feature in ecosystem assessment.
 - **Lynx recovery project** with focus on research and protection of the endangered Balkan Lynx throughout the western Green Belt of Macedonia and neighbouring countries. The project is financially supported by the Swiss-based "Marva" Foundation and implemented in collaboration with partner Universities Bern and one in Albania. Current efforts aim at the involvement of Kosovo as a fourth partner.
 - **Establishment of Sharplamina protected area** (20,000 ha proposed conservation unit) as part of the Western Green Belt of the country. The boundary definition, zoning and the collection of baseline data has been completed. The research work in support of biophysical baseline data collection started in the year 2000.

Major milestones in the planning stage of MES include:

- Define major ecological corridors in the country with emphasis on large carnivore conservation.
- Development of action plans and conservation measure for priority corridors.
- Large-scale nature protection-related public awareness campaign.

- Development of ecological network (started in 2008 with the identification of important bird areas and plant areas).
- UNDP/GEF contract for assessment of Macedonia's PA system in support of MEPP's re-proclamation initiative (11 months contract to be finished by the end of 2010). GIS maps will be produced for all sites with thematic map layers provided for most important features of each area including boundary definition.

iv) Union Cooperative for the Development of People (UCODEP)

UCODEP is an Italian-based NGO engaged in the development of Mavrovo National Park (see Chapter 2.1.1., iii). The project is financed by the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs (EUR 2.8 Mio for a 4-year period ending in 2011) and implemented by UCODEP in partnership with the Italian Toscana National Park. At current there is no cooperation with neighbouring Kosovo and Albania for trans-boundary conservation. The boundaries of Mavrovo NP have not been surveyed and/or demarcated. Mavrovo forms part of the Western Green Belt and is a designated Emerald site of the NATURA 2000 Agenda. UCODEP is not involved in any other activity related to the Green Sector in Macedonia.

Annex 5: NATURA 2000 Emerald sites in Macedonia to protect (Appleton 2009, pers. communication)

List of Emerald endangered natural habitat types requiring specific conservation measures present in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”

1 . COASTAL AND HALOPHYTIC COMMUNITIES

SALTMARSHES, SALT STEPPES, SALT SCRUBS, SALT FORESTS

Annual salt pioneer swards

! 15.115 Continental glasswort swards

! 15.A Continental salt steppes and saltmarshes

2 . NON-MARINE WATERS

22. STANDING FRESH WATER

22.1 Permanent ponds and lakes

!22.11 Lime-deficient oligotrophic waterbodies

22.4 Euhydrophyte communities

! 22.412 Frogbit rafts

Floating broad-leaved carpets

24. RUNNING WATER

!24.2 River gravel banks

3 . SCRUB AND GRASSLAND

31. TEMPERATE HEATH AND SCRUB

31.4 Alpine and boreal heaths

! 31.46 *Bruckenthalia* heaths

31.8 Western Eurasian thickets

31.8B South-eastern deciduous thickets

4 . FORESTS

41. BROAD-LEAVED DECIDUOUS FORESTS

! 41.4 Mixed ravine and slope forests

! 41.5 Acidophilous oak forests

! 41.7 Thermophilous and supra-Mediterranean oak woods

! 41.8 Mixed thermophilous forests

42. TEMPERATE CONIFEROUS FORESTS

42.1 Western Palaeartic fir forests

! 42.17 Balkano-Pontic fir forests

42.2 Western Palaeartic orogenous spruce forests

! 42.241 Rhodope spruce forest

42.5 Western Palaeartic Scots pine forests

! 42.5C South-eastern European Scots pine forests

42.6 Black pine forests

! 42.62 Western Balkan *Pinus nigra* forests

!42.7 High oro-mediterranean pine forests

42.8 Mediterranean pine woods

! 42.A Western Palearctic cypress, juniper and yew forests

TEMPERATE RIVERINE AND SWAMP FORESTS AND BRUSH

! 44.1 Riparian willow formations

! 44.7 Oriental plane and sweet gum woods

! 44.8 Southern riparian galleries and thickets

44.9 Alder, willow, oak, aspen swamp woods

! 44.9115 Eastern Carpathian alder swamp woods

5 . BOGS AND MARSHES

WATER-FRINGE VEGETATION

! 53.3 Fen-sedge beds

FENS, TRANSITION MIRES AND SPRINGS

54.1 Springs

! 54.12 Hard water springs

6. INLAND ROCKS< SCREES AND SANDS

61. SCREES

!65. CAVES

9. WOODED GRASSLANDS AND SCRUBS

91. PARKLANDS

!93. WOODED STEPPE

Annex 6: Proposed Programme and Intervention Rating Matrix

Bregalnica watershed	Proposed Intervention									
Key Criteria *	integrated spatial land-use planning	support to creation of trans-boundary conserv. areas	identification of ecologically sensitive areas in the watershed (Natura 2000)	need for regional rural development to built on on-going activities and lessons learnt	sustainable waste management (IPA funds)	waste water management	formalize cooperation agreement between key actors (Regional Planning Centres)	assessment of natural resources use in watershed	identification of main sources of contamination (water, air, soil)	disaster response, fire, water
Compliance with Swiss/SDC-SECO focal development assistance criteria;	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	3	3
Contributing to reaching NATURA 2000 goals;	3	3	3	2	0	2	3	3	1	3
Compliance with national biodiversity strategy and Macedonian priority conservation goals;	2	1	2	3	0	2	3	2	1	2
Contributing to national priority sustainable economic development objectives;	3	2	1	3	1	2	3	2	2	3
Suitable to maximize conservation effects with limited SDC-SECO funding available;	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	3	3
Suitable for diversification, amplification and replication;	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Complementary to on-going and planned SDC-SECO interventions/projects and other donor activities benefitting nature conservation and producing synergies;	3	3	3	3	3	3		3	3	3
Maximizing benefits by addressing different target groups (rural poor, decision-makers, gender-awareness, youth etc.);	1	1	1	3	3	1		3	1	3

Bregalnica watershed	Proposed Intervention										
Key Criteria *	integrated spatial land-use planning	support to creation of trans-boundary conserv. areas	identification of ecologically sensitive areas in the watershed (Natura 2000)	need for regional rural development to built on on-going activities and lessons learnt	sustainable waste management (IPA funds)	waste water management	formalize cooperation agreement between key actors (Regional Planning Centres)	assessment of natural resources use in watershed	identification of main sources of contamination (water, air, soil)	disaster response, fire, water	
Contributing to poverty alleviation and stabilizing rural livelihoods;	2	2	1	3	1	1		2	1	1	
Providing job opportunities;	1	1	1	2	1	1		2	1	1	
Addressing root causes of biodiversity loss and environmental degradation;	3	2	3	2	3	3		2	3	3	
Focus on identified key sustainable development nodes and accommodating priority conservation goals;	3	2	3	2	3	2		2	3	2	
Complimentary to on-going activities creating enabling environment and visible synergies;	3	3	3	3	3	3		3	3	3	
Existence of favourable local framework conditions;	1	3	2	2	3	2		1	1	3	
Political commitment and willingness to cooperate on a municipal and community level;	2	2	2	3	3	3		2	2	3	
Score	36	34	34	40	29	34		18	36	31	39
Criteria Rating Matrix*:	3 full compliance		2 in parts 1 marginally		0 no compliance						

Annex 7: Abbreviated ToR for the Proposed Feasibility Study

The proposed Feasibility Study would commence with an in-depth field assessment of the framework conditions related to the two proposed geographic target areas supported through a comprehensive literature- and document review. This would be followed by an analysis of baseline data collected during the field survey and the elaboration of the final feasibility assessment report. The field study involves the following steps:

- Identification and analysis of key stakeholders directly linked to the respective target area;
- Stakeholder discussions with focus on the proposed and possible alternative measures/interventions suitable for possible SDC funding under the proposed Umbrella Programme;
- Meetings with the Agency for Spatial Planning to discuss possible co-financing, collaboration, approach and work volume related to the proposed integrated spatial land use planning for the target area(s);
- Conducting a comprehensive threat analysis which identifies local drivers of biodiversity loss and barriers to nature conservation;
- Identification of mitigation measures suitable to effectively address root causes and imminent threats to nature conservation;
- Implementation of a rapid rural assessment and a socio-economic analysis in support of identifying interventions suitable to contribute to poverty alleviation, livelihood stabilization and enhancement of local living conditions (stabilizing rural population);
- Preliminary identification of ecologically sensitive areas in need of special protection (jointly with knowledgeable local stakeholders and NGOs such as MES);
- Proposal of suitable conservation management for identified areas in need of protection;
- Multi-stakeholder mid-term workshop to present preliminary findings and discuss proposed interventions;
- Final selection of most suitable geographic target area using objective rating matrix and professional judgement;
- Final selection of interventions for selected target area and elaboration of a corresponding profile for each proposed measure. The profiles should be structured as follows:
 - Rationale and justification
 - Description
 - Implementation and implementation responsibilities (suitable partner)
 - Duration
 - Budget estimate
- Identification of co-financing opportunities and partnerships for specific interventions;
- Identification and capability assessment of potential partners chosen for corresponding intervention;
- Preparation of result-oriented logframe matrix and overall budget.

The final report should be structured as follows:

Section 1 Introduction

Background

Constraints and limitations to the feasibility study

Methodological approach

Section 2 Situation analysis and description of project

Biophysical framework of target area

- Climate
- Geology, soils, geomorphology, mineral deposits and landscape
- Flora and vegetation
- Fauna
- Threatened species and ecosystem conservation value
- Water regime

Socio-cultural economic framework

- Demography
- Household income and employment
- Livestock and agriculture
- Tourism in the region
- Actual land use
- History of land use
- Land tenure

Policy and legal framework related to nature conservation

Stakeholder analysis

Projects related to the project or study area

Section 3 proposed project

Project justification

Project overview

Overall goals and objectives of project

Meeting goals and objectives

Option 1: Osogovo/Bregalnica

- description
- added value and feasibility

Option 2: Ecological Corridor Western Greenbelt

- description
- Added value and feasibility

Selected project area

- Description and proposed zoning
- Side based conservation priorities
- Elaboration of actual land use map
- Elaboration of land tenure map
- Elaboration of conservation map
- Identification and description of conflict areas

Proposed project components (profiling)
Priority needs
Gender aspects
Proposed project approach
Logical framework
Project organization and implementation
Grant recipient(s)
Project structure
Target groups and beneficiaries
Project cost
Risk assessment and mitigation opportunities
Sustainable financing and exit strategy
Consultant Votum

Timeline

The proposed timeline of the feasibility study is 40 days

2 days preparation

20 days field work and travel

 7 days Osogovo/Bregalnica

 7 days Western Green Belt

14 days elaboration of report

(4 additional days for Team Leader)

Team composition:

- **Team Leader** (international specialist with expertise in nature conservation, participatory rural development planning, project design and feasibility assessments of complex sustainable development projects) 40 days total
- **Socio-Economist** (preferably international specialist or local specialist with proven fluency in writing in English; preferred speciality in agriculture and rural development, experienced with rapid rural assessment) total of 25 days
- **Biodiversity/nature conservation** (local specialist with English writing skills) 25 days