



# **Joint Meeting of the Bern Convention Network of Special Focal Points on Eradication of Illegal Killing, Trapping and Trade in Wild Birds and the CMS Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean**

*(Bonn Germany, 13 to 15 May 2025)*

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## **WORKSHOP ON NATIONAL ACTION PLANS ON THE ILLEGAL KILLING, TAKING AND TRADE OF MIGRATORY BIRDS**

### **MEETING REPORT**

#### **Summary:**

This is the meeting report of a Workshop organised by CMS and the Montenegrin Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Development in September 2024, in Podgorica, Montenegro on the elaboration and implementation of National IKB Action Plans. The workshop was directed to Balkan countries.



The European Union was recognized as Champion Plus for their generous support and commitment towards addressing Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean for the period 2015 - 2028.



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**Workshop on National Action Plans on the Illegal Killing,  
Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds**

*(Podgorica, Montenegro, 2-4 September 2024)*

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UNEP/CMS/IKB-NAP Meeting Report

**MEETING REPORT**

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## List of Acronyms

AEMLAP	African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Action Plan
AEWA	African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement
AOS	Albanian Ornithological Society
BPSSS	Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
CLCC	Collaborative Living Landscapes Conservancy
CMS	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
COP	Conference of the Parties
CPW	Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management
CUFAA	Carabinieri Command of the Forest, Environmental, and Agri-food units
CZIP	Center for Protection and Research of birds of Montenegro
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EU	European Union
FACE	European Federation for Hunting and Conservation
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
GPEC	Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity
IBA	Important Bird and Biodiversity Area
ICLEI	Local Governments for Sustainability
IKB	Illegal Killing, Taking, and Trade of Migratory Birds
IMPEL	European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law
ISPRA	Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MEP	Ministry of Environmental Protection
MEPGT	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Green Transition
MIKT	Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PPNEA	Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment in Albania
RSP	Rome Strategic Plan
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound
SWiPE	Successful Wildlife Crime Prosecution in Europe
UN	United Nations
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNEP-WCMC	UN Environment Programme - World Conservation Monitoring Centre
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNTOC	United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
VCF	Vulture Conservation Foundation
WCA	Wildlife Crime Academy
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

## Meeting Summary and main meeting outcomes

1. The workshop took place 2-4 September 2024 in Podgorica, Montenegro and was co-hosted by the government of Montenegro and CMS. CMS also engaged BirdLife Europe and CZIP/BirdLife Montenegro to support with local workshop organisation and report writing. The workshop was supported financially through an EU grant to the CMS.
2. The workshop was addressed especially to Balkan countries, specifically to Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Unfortunately, Slovenia did not participate. It was attended by 38 participants in total, including eight experts nominated by the countries' MIKT members or focal points, and six experts nominated by NGOs with experience in the subject area.
3. The mandate of the workshop came from CMS Resolution 11.16 (Rev. COP14) and the MIKT Rome Strategic Plan 2020-2030. The latter foresees the organization of regional workshops for the development and implementation of National Action Plans (NAP) for addressing illegal killing, taking and trade of migratory birds (IKB). The Workshop goal was to discuss in-depth the process of development and implementation of IKB NAPs, to exchange experience and best practice and to support the countries in the development of their IKB NAPs. CMS MIKT Guidance on developing and implementing IKB NAPs was introduced and provided the basic structure for the meeting.
4. All participating experts from the six countries acknowledged the necessity of an IKB NAP in their country. Montenegro confirmed full commitment to finalise for adoption an IKB NAP by the end of 2024, and Croatia confirmed that it was advancing with an IKB NAP Committee and aiming to adopt it in a shortly.
5. The types of IKB reported as prevalent in the Balkan Peninsula were illegal poisoning, which all agreed was a type of IKB, illegal shooting and trapping, use of illegal means of capturing or killing birds, such as using decoys, nets or bird calling devices and capturing birds for trade. Some countries seemed to be treating the problem of illegal poisoning of wild birds and IKB as separate issues, advocating for separate action plans and protocols. It was agreed that it was advisable to address the illegal poisoning of wild birds as part of the broader issue of IKB and advocate for it as a unified concern as part of one plan, rather than treating it as a separate matter.
6. All participating experts from the Balkan Peninsula highlighted that hunting tourists significantly contributed to IKB within the region. They identified especially Italian tourists as of being of particular concern. This shared concern presented an opportunity for regional, bilateral or multilateral coordination, as all countries could collectively address the matter with Italian authorities, including the Ministry of Tourism and relevant Italian embassies. It was noted that while a ban on hunting tourism could effectively tackle that particular concern, a comprehensive ban on hunting, similar to those implemented in Albania and

Lebanon, could potentially aggravate the situation if perceived as a single solution to the problem. FACE was invited to engage more actively in the hunting tourism challenge.

7. All countries agreed that the best way to organize the development of a NAP was through having a national multi-stakeholder Committee (or Steering Committee). They also agreed that it was essential for a government Ministry, like the Ministry of Environment, to take the lead in the process of developing a NAP, inviting other relevant government Ministries and relevant stakeholders. The idea of a regional Committee for the Balkans overseeing IKB NAPs and meeting once per year, was also considered, as all countries faced similar challenges.
8. Participants agreed that developing a NAP was important for fostering collaboration and coordination among various government institutions and stakeholders. Additionally, it was highlighted that developing an IKB NAP can support the process of preparing a Scoreboard submission. The Scoreboard is a voluntary, self-assessment tool adopted by MIKT members for measuring progress in combating IKB. Alternatively, having an IKB NAP can help in preparing a complete Scoreboard submission.
9. A well-developed strategic document or an IKB NAP were seen as key documents for combating IKB; facilitating timely and informed decision-making; providing a legal framework for law enforcement agencies; creating a binding agreement among various institutions to ensure collaboration between institutions and stakeholders; identifying obstacles to achieving goals; serving as a fundraising tool; and enabling effective monitoring of progress.
10. It was recommended that both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders use project management and planning tools such as those defined by conservation standards<sup>1</sup> or “theory of change” when developing the IKB NAP.
11. The legal basis for adopting an IKB NAP was discussed extensively, and it was agreed that for CMS Parties the national legislation ratifying the CMS, possibly making reference to CMS Resolutions and Decisions, could be used as a legal basis for adopting an Action Plan on IKB. Similarly, opportunities may exist in the legislation ratifying the Bern Convention.
12. All participants agreed that it was essential to plan the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the NAP, because the development of the plan alone was not a guarantee that the plan would be implemented. All participants also agreed that foreseeing a budget for the IKB NAP was essential to make it work.
13. Participating experts and other participants shared concerns about lack of political will; lack of interest from other government departments and lack of resources and agreed that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://conservationstandards.org/download-cs/>

effective communication and awareness raising can help in increasing political will. As regards the lack of interest from prosecutors and judges who were seen as essential stakeholders, the issue of tackling wildlife crime in the academic curriculums of judges and prosecutors was promoted as a very important way of raising judges' and prosecutors' interest and awareness. This could be accomplished through engaging more strongly with the academic community.

14. All agreed that having trained and specialized public prosecutors and establishing specialized police units focused on wildlife crime could serve as among the most effective tools for combating IKB.
15. All participants agreed that NGOs had a crucial role to play in the development and implementation of IKB NAPs, especially through providing data, training and capacity building, and doing awareness raising work. At the same time, it was agreed that NGOs had to play a supporting role to the governments, and not to lead the process themselves. Acceptance of NGO data by governments varied by country; some governments categorically rejected NGO data, while others expressed willingness to accept and incorporate it. It was advisable to standardize the data collection process to facilitate easier sharing and understanding.
16. Experience shared by the Italian expert was very valuable and provided a clear insight into important opportunities and challenges of implementing a NAP at the national level, involving many stakeholders and reporting across government agencies.
17. Participants considered whether a regional informal network of experts should be set up to update each other on progress and to request help and support, but no agreement was reached. Most country experts preferred to use email for communication on an ad hoc basis. It was also agreed that the importance of face-to-face meetings should not be overlooked, as they often led to more productive outcomes.
18. Participating experts and other participants also shared concerns about lack of enforcement of laws and similarly by the possible lack of enforcement of the IKB NAP even if it were adopted. News shared about the training offered through the Wildlife Crime Academy set up by VCF, the Junta of Andalucía, the Ministry of Ecological Transition of Spain, and the Guardia Civil of Spain with support by the EU, provided encouraging news about the very high-level training provided and the resulting enthusiasm for investigating and prosecuting wildlife crime. It was agreed that promoting the Wildlife Crime Academy and offering the chance of participation to all countries was very important.

## **DAY 1 Monday, 2 September 2024**

### **1. Opening the meeting and welcoming remarks**

19. This event took place in Podgorica, Montenegro, from September 2nd to 4th and was organized as part of an action under *the Rome Strategic Plan 2020-2030: Eradicating Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade in Wild Birds in Europe and the Mediterranean region* (RSP), aiming to facilitate the development of National Action Plans.
20. Mr. Iván Ramírez (Head of Avian Species Team, CMS Secretariat) delivered welcoming remarks. He welcomed 38 participants and experts from government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across six Balkan nations—Montenegro, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Albania—as well as experts from Italy and NGOs. This included eight experts nominated by the countries' MIKT members or focal points and six experts nominated by NGOs with experience in the subject area. Unfortunately, Slovenia did not participate. The mandate of the workshop came from the CMS Resolution 11.16 (Rev. COP14) and the MIKT Rome Strategic Plan 2020-2030. The latter foresees the organization of regional workshops for the development and implementation of National Action Plans (NAP) for addressing illegal killing, taking and trade of migratory birds (IKB). The Workshop goal was to discuss in-depth the process of development and implementation of IKB NAPs, to exchange experience and best practice and to support the countries in the development of their IKB NAPs.

### **2. Election of the Chairman**

21. Mr. Ramírez proposed Mr. Aleksandar Perović, Senior Advisor at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as Chair of the workshop. Mr. Perović's nomination was accepted unanimously by the participants. Mr. Perović accepted the nomination and assumed the role of Chair of the Meeting (referred to as the Chairman hereinafter).

### **3. Welcoming remarks of the host country**

22. The Chairman welcomed the participants and announced that Mr. Damjan Ćulafić, Minister of Ecology, Sustainable Development, and Northern Region Development of Montenegro, was unable to attend the workshop due to personal matters. He then invited Ms. Anela Sijarić, an appointed representative of the Ministry, to take the floor.
23. The representative delivered remarks on behalf of the Minister of Ecology, Sustainable Development, and Northern Region Development, welcoming participants to the workshop and expressing gratitude for their response to the invitation. She noted that Montenegro had historically been recognized not only on the Balkan Peninsula but also across the European continent and beyond for its significant natural and cultural values. She highlighted the country's wealth and diversity of natural and cultural heritage, all situated within a relatively small area.



24. She explained that Montenegro's system of protected areas, which covered approximately 14% of its territory, was well-developed and had a long-standing tradition. She mentioned that of the 533 bird species identified in Europe, 352 could be found in Montenegro, accounting for 65% of the European bird fauna, with 223 breeding species confirmed in the country. However, she expressed concern over data indicating that between 64,000 and 157,000 birds were illegally killed each year. That issue was particularly pronounced in relation to rare and protected species such as raptors, vultures, and migratory birds, as Montenegro was acknowledged as part of the Adriatic Migratory Corridor, which connected Europe and Asia.
25. The representative emphasized that the workshop aimed to advance efforts to eradicate the illegal killing, taking, and trading of wild birds in Europe and the Mediterranean region. She expressed hope that participants would share their experiences in developing and implementing Action Plans with experts from various countries and the NGO sector, framing this as an opportunity for broader cooperation and encouragement among all nations in their fight against the illegal killing of birds.
26. She sincerely hoped that the workshop would foster cooperation and mutual understanding, providing a platform for the exchange of challenges and questions encountered by all. In closing, she wished all participants a productive workshop.

#### **4. Welcoming remarks by CMS Secretariat**

27. The Chairman gave the floor to Mr. Iván Ramírez, who introduced himself and bid welcome to the participants on behalf of the CMS Secretariat. Mr. Ramírez emphasized that the workshop on NAP addressing illegal killing, taking, and trade of migratory birds (IKB) was jointly organized by the CMS Secretariat and the Government of Montenegro, and it was addressed to the Balkans. He conveyed his hope that this meeting would mark a significant turning point in the battle against IKB in the region and extended his gratitude to the Center for Protection and Research of Birds of Montenegro (CZIP), the BirdLife International partner, for their assistance in organizing the event.
28. Mr. Ramírez emphasized that according to CMS data and scientific analysis, one in five CMS-listed species faced the threat of extinction. While the threats were varied, overexploitation, particularly through IKB, was recognized as a main contributing factor. He urged participants to keep this in mind throughout the meeting.
29. On a more positive note, he mentioned that an effective legislative framework and strong capacities across the countries were essential to addressing the issue, making the development of the NAPs fundamental. However, he also underscored the importance of ensuring that the NAPs produce tangible results, necessitating the implementation of effective enforcement mechanisms, engagement of enforcement agencies, and well-trained prosecutors. Participants were encouraged to actively engage in the workshop by voicing

their thoughts and posing questions to promote mutual understanding and cooperation. Mr. Iván Ramírez introduced his CMS colleague, Ms. Claire (Foteini) Papazoglou, MIKT Coordinator, who possessed extensive knowledge of IKB challenges and solutions.

## **5. Adoption of the Agenda and Schedule**

30. The Chairman asked participants whether they agreed with the agenda. It was noted that the meeting was hybrid and online participants could attend and contribute through the Zoom platform. The Chairman communicated the house rules to the participants. The agenda was adopted as proposed (Document UNEP/CMS/IKB-NAP\_Doc.4.2 Rev.1). As the meeting was ahead of time, the Chairman suggested a round of introductions among those present. The detailed list of participants can be found in the Annex.

## **6. CMS Mandate and role of MIKT, update from CMS COP14**

31. Mr. Iván Ramírez delivered a presentation on the CMS Conference of the Parties (COP14) held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan in 2024. He highlighted that 2024 was a pivotal year, marked by positive developments, including a new strategic plan for CMS and a renewed mandate for global action on IKB. The COP emphasized the importance of science for parties and stakeholders. Notably, the inaugural "State of the World's Migratory Species" report<sup>2</sup> was launched, revealing that 1 in 5 CMS-listed species faced extinction, 44% were experiencing population declines, 444 species were impacted by overexploitation, and 75% suffered from habitat degradation.
32. Additionally, reports on Climate Change and Migratory Species, Migratory Species and Health, and the Insect Decline and its Impact on Migratory Insectivorous Species were presented. At COP14, two global initiatives were introduced: the Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity (GPEC) and the Global Initiative on the Taking of Migratory Species. Alongside the Samarkand Strategic Plan, several other initiatives and plans were launched, and more species were added to Appendices I and II of the CMS. A key outcome of COP14 was a Review of Resolution 11.16, which addresses the prevention of IKB, by adding an acknowledgement to the Rome Strategic Plan 2020-2030. Additionally, he explained that the Asia-Pacific Task Force on Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds had been established, mirroring the MIKT while a new Task Force for South-West Asia on Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds was expected to be launched in Saudi Arabia by the end of 2024. This would result in coordinated efforts among three CMS Task Forces. Moreover, a Decision was adopted requiring parties and international organizations to utilize the Scoreboard and to submit results to CMS between COPs, which occur every three years. Finally, there were Decisions mandating the need to review the production, sale, and use of mist nets on a national and international level.

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<sup>2</sup> Available on CMS website

33. Following the conclusion of Mr. Ramirez's presentation, the Chairman informed the participants that Montenegro was appointed as the alternative member for the European region on the CMS Standing Committee at COP14, indicating a more proactive role for Montenegro in the Convention.

## **7. Overview – Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds and National IKB Action Plans**

34. The Chairman gave the floor to Ms. Papazoglou. She referenced Resolution 11.16 (Rev. COP14), highlighting the mandate for the establishment of MIKT. She noted that since 2015, the European Union had supported MIKT through the CMS Secretariat, with funding extended until 2028. This support included funding for the Coordinator post, organization of meetings and workshops, as well as funding for essential studies and tasks in the coming years. Ms. Papazoglou commended on the joint working and collaboration between the Bern Convention and MIKT active since 2017.
35. Regarding the Rome Strategic Plan, adopted by the Bern Convention in 2019 and by MIKT in 2020, she emphasized its goal to reduce the scale and scope of IKB by at least 50% by 2030. The RSP encouraged the development and implementation of NAPs or relevant policy documents as the optimal means to achieving the goal. Ms. Papazoglou outlined the five objectives of the RSP: a. understanding the scope and scale of the issue; b. prevention of IKB; c. effective legislation; d. enforcement of legislation; and e. effective justice for offenders.
36. She explained that the choice of the Balkan Peninsula for the workshop was due to regional similarities. Ms. Papazoglou announced that a similar workshop would be organized in the North-Africa and Middle Eastern region in 2025. An action from the RSP called for the development of Guidance for National Action Plans (UNEP/CMS/IKB-NAP\_Doc.6), which had been adopted by MIKT and the Bern Convention in 2022. She underlined that that IKB was a multifaceted challenge which required political commitment and a robust strategy, recommending a zero-tolerance policy. She emphasized that one of the first considerations for countries should be to assess whether an IKB NAP was necessary, and if it were, whether it had to be national, regional, or local based on the nature of the problem. It was widely accepted and recommended that countries with IKB issues should develop and implement IKB action plans. A significant concern not addressed in the Guidance was the legal basis for NAP adoption, as countries often struggled with the legislative processes for adopting Action Plans. She suggested that countries that had ratified the CMS could refer to the national transposing legislation as the legal basis for adopting Action Plans that possibly made reference to CMS Resolutions and Decisions, which in turn mandated the elaboration of Action Plans. She suggested that the relevant resolutions are CMS Resolution 11.15 (Rev. COP14) on the prevention of poisoning of migratory birds, Resolution 11.17 (Rev. COP14) which outlined the African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Action Plan (AEMLAP), Resolution 11.18 (Rev. COP14) addressing the Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) Global Action Plan, and Resolution 12.10 (Rev. COP14) focused on the conservation of African-Eurasian vultures.

37. When developing an Action Plan, Ms. Papazoglou emphasized the critical need to establish Action Plan Committees, which were highly recommended for effective guidance in the development and implementation of the action plan. In the absence of such committees, stakeholders have reportedly faced challenges in reaching consensus on key issues. She also highlighted the necessity of mapping and identifying all stakeholders, which encompassed both governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations as recommended in the Guidance document.
38. Furthermore, the significance of action planning workshops was underscored, ideally led by a neutral facilitator. The Guidance document included also a template proposal for a logical framework. Ms. Papazoglou noted that success indicators were essential tools, and she emphasized that the RSP indicators and the Scoreboard questions were very appropriate for use as indicators in IKB NAPs. Lastly, she stressed the importance of addressing both the timeline and budget within the NAP.
39. Regarding the Scoreboard, Ms. Papazoglou defined it as a self-assessment tool for reporting progress in combating IKB that was originally adopted in 2017 and revised in 2022 to bring it more in line with the RSP. All MIKT and Bern Convention members were invited to complete the Scoreboard assessment and to date, three Scoreboard reporting periods had been completed (2018, 2020, and 2023), with 39 countries participating at least once and 15 countries (including Montenegro) completing all three assessments. The reporting period from 2017-2020 was governed by the Tunis Action Plan, while reporting period since 2020 was under the Rome Strategic Plan. In closing, she emphasized that the process of developing an IKB NAP or completing the Scoreboard could be mutually beneficial, with countries starting with the Scoreboard and then moving to develop an IKB NAP or vice versa.
40. Following Ms. Papazoglou's presentation, the Chairman shared insights from his experience in developing the management plan for the brown bear in Montenegro, underscoring the critical importance of stakeholder identification for the establishment of a committee for large carnivores. He emphasized the necessity of ensuring that all stakeholders are aligned, particularly regarding political advocacy efforts.
41. Next the Chairman invited Ms. Anela Sijarić, Head of the Department for Freshwater and Terrestrial Ecosystems at the Directorate for Climate Change and Nature Protection, and a designated representative of the Minister of Ecology of Montenegro to make her presentation concerning the NAP on IKB in Montenegro. She commenced by noting that the NAP was still in the drafting stages, with expectations for completion by the end of 2024. She highlighted Montenegro's status as a biodiversity hotspot, with nearly 14% of its territory designated as protected. The country boasted over 3,200 plant species, including 223 endemic species native to the Balkan Peninsula, with 60% of Montenegro covered by high-quality forests. In relation to bird diversity, she indicated a nesting bird density index of 0.557, the highest in the Balkans, compared to the regional average of 0.435. Of the 533

bird species identified in Europe, 353 were present in Montenegro, representing 60% of the continent's avifauna. Key biodiversity hotspots included Skadar Lake, Ulcinj saline, and the Prokletije and Durmitor mountain ranges. Ms. Sijarić noted that 33 locations in Montenegro were listed as Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA). Regarding the legal protection of birds, she highlighted that Montenegro had a longstanding tradition in this area, with the first legal act established over a century ago. Prior to the adoption of the Law on Nature Protection, the protection of bird species was addressed through hunting legislation. Since 2006, Montenegro had permanently protected 297 bird species, with additional species expected to be included by the end of 2024. Ms. Sijarić stated that the legal foundation for the development of the NAP was rooted in international conventions and resolutions, notably the RSP along with the Scoreboard, EU roadmap and Recommendations No. 171 and No. 177 under the Bern Convention.

42. Ms. Sijarić stressed several critical issues affecting bird populations in Montenegro, primarily linked to habitat loss and illegal hunting. She emphasized how agricultural practices in the Zeta region negatively impacted local wildlife, particularly the use of mist nets and fishing nets around fields, which inadvertently kill various bird species—essentially harming insectivorous birds that control pests and benefit farmers. Discussing IKB, Ms. Sijarić noted that migratory species, especially those that were rare and protected, were particularly vulnerable in Montenegro due to its position on a significant migratory route. While tradition and recreation drive some hunting practices, she pointed out that these motivations were often associated with an aging hunting demographic. Trophy hunting tended to focus on large, charismatic birds such as raptors, whereas poaching was more heavily motivated by financial incentives.
43. The illegal hunting trade was worsened by the involvement of certain hunters, notably of Italian nationality, who engaged in smuggling poached birds to restaurants, where they were sold as luxury items. Common methods of poaching included the use of electronic caller-decoys, mist nets, traps, and automatic/semi-automatic firearms — practices that were illegal under Montenegro's laws but frequently used. The primary targets of these illegal activities were species such as rock partridges, common quail, and various waterfowl, further threatening already declining bird populations.
44. Ms. Sijarić emphasized that game wardens, inspectors, and police officers were facing staffing shortages, and the penalties imposed were insufficient;<sup>3</sup> though she believed that the general public was growing more aware of the issue and the need to protect the habitats and biodiversity. She also underscored the importance of educating both authorities and the public as a crucial element in addressing the issue. It was highlighted that increasing capacity was essential, alongside adjustments to the working hours of the wardens or enforcers employed by relevant authorities, which should include a third shift to address peak illegal hunting times, particularly during early mornings. Ms. Sijarić noted that most illegal activities occurred in protected areas or outside designated hunting grounds.

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<sup>3</sup> Monetary fine and/or a prison sentence up to 3 years.

Information leaks posed a challenge, as Montenegro was a small country. It was noted that the NAP for Montenegro was being developed in collaboration with CZIP. She added that there were only six environmental inspectors in the entire country, and unfortunately they could not attend the meeting. She used that example to demonstrate the difficulty bringing all stakeholders together to exchange and collaborate. On a positive note, she acknowledged the attendance of representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Hunting Association, considering their contributions to the development and implementation of the NAP would be crucial.

45. Following the conclusion of Ms. Sijarić's presentation, the expert from Italy, Ms. Arianna Aradis remarked that in Italy, members of the authorities, mainly enforcers, were usually moved to different parts of the country, in order to minimize the chances of personal familiarity with the perpetrators. In response to that, Ms. Sijarić said that according to the law, inspectors had to be switched to different regions every two years, though in practice, this was not happening so regularly.
46. Jovan Andevski from Vulture Conservation Foundation indicated that a LIFE Project focused on wildlife crime, which could assist in the development of the IKB action plan, was currently in the pre-approval stage, and Montenegro was likely to be one of the target countries.
47. Ms. Marija Lekić from CZIP addressed the participants remotely. She noted that CZIP initiated and drafted the NAP in 2019 with input from multiple stakeholders. Despite delays caused by the 2020 pandemic and a change in government, it took an additional four years of advocacy for the NAP to be incorporated into the government's official program. She acknowledged that inter-institutional cooperation at various levels remained a significant challenge in Montenegro and expressed hope that the NAP would promote collaboration. She also highlighted the Wildlife Crime Academy (WCA) as a key initiative in combating IKB. Regarding budgeting, Ms. Lekić emphasized that funding issues needed resolution, advocating for a streamlined source of funding from institutional budgets.
48. Next the Chairman invited Ms. Arianna Aradis, a member of the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) and she began her presentation on lessons learnt from implementing an IKB NAP in Italy, by noting that the killing and keeping of birds was legal and prevalent in Italy until the 1970s, with no quantitative limits or restrictions on methods, and only minimal regulations regarding hunting periods. Since then, there had been a significant shift, marked by the introduction of the first wildlife legislation in 1968, which established the protection of biodiversity as a national asset. The transposition of the EU Birds Directive in 1992 introduced both administrative and criminal sanctions. She highlighted that, despite the advancements in hunting legislation, poaching remained a persistent issue in Italy.
49. Data on IKB revealed a significant annual death toll in Italy, a concern that prompted the EU Commission to initiate an infringement case against the country in 2013. Since that time,

the situation had improved; the Ministry of Environment had developed a NAP in collaboration with ISPRA. ISPRA was responsible for collecting data to monitor on progress in report addressing IKB frequency, types, geographical scope, and identifying critical areas requiring attention. The report also aimed to modernize the existing hunting legislation. A critical analysis of the motivations behind IKB indicated that financial incentives were the primary driver, closely followed by tradition, a factor that was particularly challenging to change. In 2016, the geographical review identified seven black spots, with Sicily noted as one of the worst. Two additional areas have been recognized since then. The draft NAP underwent a comprehensive review in a technical workshop involving all relevant stakeholders before being subjected to public consultation. The final version of the NAP was subsequently approved by a Permanent Conference for relations between the State, the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces in 2017.

50. The Italian NAP was organized into five sections comprising thirty-one actions, each with its own priority, timeframe, designated responsible stakeholder, and budget. She emphasized that a primary objective was the establishment of a Steering Committee to act as a national board overseeing the NAP implementation progress. From 2017 to 2019, the Committee convened seven meetings, initially segregating technical and institutional staff. However, as Ms. Aradis noted, it became evident that joint meetings were considerably more effective. Regarding the Scoreboard, she mentioned that it was conducted during all three reporting periods, benefiting from strong collaboration among all stakeholders. She highlighted the essential role of the Carabinieri Command of the Forest, Environmental, and Agri-food units (CUFAA),<sup>4</sup> in addressing IKB in Italy. A significant challenge of the NAP was the presence of overlap in local jurisdictions, leading to blind spots. Initially, there was also a knowledge gap among prosecutors and judges, who perceived IKB as less significant than other criminal offenses in Italy. This perception shifted when IKB was framed in terms of financial impact and damages.
51. Ms. Aradis highlighted that one outcome of the NAP was the development of the Italian wildlife poisoning database, which was updated annually. She also stressed the significance of the police anti-poisoning canine units for effective discovery and monitoring. Recently, ISPRA had produced a technical document titled "Crimes Against Wild Birds," which provided thematic insights to address the illegal killing of birds, targeted especially to judges and prosecutors, as well as other IKB stakeholders. This document was essential for contextualizing the issue, emphasizing bird migration, and incorporating an international perspective. Additionally, it addressed the revenue loss associated with the illegal killing of birds of prey. Although the NAP in Italy formally expired in 2020, some actions continued into 2021 and 2022. Despite these efforts, the EU Commission initiated another infringement case on hunting against Italy because several regions were not adhering to hunting periods in line with EU guidance, and there had been insufficient progress in eliminating lead ammunition.

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<sup>4</sup> *Comando unità forestali, ambientali e agroalimentari*

52. After Ms. Aradis' presentation, Jovan Andevski from VCF praised the efforts of the CUFAA in Sardinia, noting that, in his experience, Italy possessed the most comprehensive wildlife poisoning database.
53. Stefan Ferger from Euronatur inquired about the EU Pilot case that prompted the development of the NAP on IKB in Italy, specifically regarding its outcomes related to the infringement. Ms. Aradis responded that the case was closed in 2020, directly due to the implementation of the NAP.
54. Ms. Papazoglou noted that Italy was once considered one of the most significant black spots for IKB in Europe. She emphasized that acknowledging the existence of the problem and maintaining transparency had been a vital step toward addressing it.
55. The Chairman noted that the education of prosecutors and judges was a concern in Montenegro too and sought recommendations for addressing this issue. Ms. Aradis emphasized the importance of communication and proposed academic lectures on the subject of IKB, particularly for future generations of judges and prosecutors. She concluded by highlighting the significance of framing the issue in terms of revenue loss, damage, and illegal gain.
56. Uroš Pantović from VCF noted that one of the initiatives under the BalkanDetox LIFE Project was focused on raising awareness among prosecutors. In North Macedonia and Serbia, a university professor participated in a workshop and integrated the issue into the curriculum, which he viewed as a significant advancement in addressing the problem moving forward.
57. The Chairman then gave the floor to Mr. Jovan Andevski, Programmes Manager and European Regional Coordinator of the Vulture Multi-species Action Plan, who delivered a presentation on the methodology used in the BalkanDetox LIFE project for capacity building and engagement with relevant authorities in the fight against wildlife poisoning. He highlighted that the primary challenge facing vulture conservation, their geographical distribution, and extinction was the illegal use of poison, a significant issue not only in the Balkans, but also worldwide. Mr. Andevski stressed that wildlife crime constituted a serious offense and that adherence to the criminal code was mandatory, not optional. He drew a connection between wildlife poisoning and human health risks, citing the high potency and toxicity of the chemicals involved. He referenced a study conducted in the Balkan Peninsula that investigated the misuse of pesticides, revealing numerous instances of human poisoning linked to illegal pesticide usage. He noted that since the early 2000s, approximately 20 million euros have been allocated to vulture conservation and anti-poisoning initiatives in the Balkan Peninsula, a relatively modest amount compared to over 100 million euros spent across Europe in the last two decades.



58. In 2019, an opportunity arose to initiate a pilot project in collaboration with the MAVA Foundation, aimed at fostering partnerships among non-governmental organizations in eligible Balkan Peninsula countries. This endeavor led to a study revealing that nearly 500 vultures had been poisoned over the past two decades in the Balkans. Furthermore, it determined that only about 20% of illegal poisoning incidents were discovered, suggesting that at least 2,500 vultures may have been affected in the same timeframe. The project strengthened relationships among participating NGOs, which resulted in the launch of the BalkanDetox LIFE project in 2020. The project focused on addressing wildlife poisoning and enhancing capabilities through situation analysis, committee establishment, operational protocol development, and the preparation of national roadmaps.
59. The overlapping jurisdictions and involvement of various governmental structures were recognized as significant barriers in the fight against the illegal poisoning of wildlife, given the complexity of the issue. Consequently, Mr. Andevski underscored the importance of establishing national anti-poisoning working groups that include all relevant institutions, such as ministries of environmental protection, ministries of agriculture, and law enforcement agencies. These working groups align with the committees recommended by the Guidance on IKB NAPs. As the lack of capacity was almost invariably identified as the main problem in all the project countries, the Wildlife Crime Academy (WCA) had emerged as a critical resource. The WCA provides essential training aimed at building a new generation of wildlife crime investigators and professionals. At the time of the workshop, over 300 individuals had benefited from this training, either directly or indirectly, enabling them to pass on crucial knowledge and skills within their respective nations. Mr. Andevski pointed to a key-moment of the Academy - formulation of jurisdictional matrices, which set the groundwork for a structured approach to combating wildlife crime. Following these workshops, a high-level multinational meeting was convened, focusing on public prosecutors—key stakeholders in enforcing wildlife protection laws.
60. Mr. Andevski highlighted the importance of success metrics, pointing to Spain as the best example, where poisoning incidents have been reduced by 90% in the timespan of 20 years, as a result of tremendous efforts on behalf of the authorities. To track progress within the BalkanDetox project, a tailored scoreboard for poisoning incidents had been developed, comprising three vital categories: operational capacity evaluation, field performance assessment, and the analysis of anti-poisoning enforcement measures. Mr. Andevski concluded his presentation by once more stressing the importance of people, remarking that this problem cannot be managed by a single organization and least of all a non-governmental organization. He emphasized that this serious issue must be tackled by the governmental institutions, with collaboration being of utmost importance.
61. Following the conclusion of Mr. Andevski's presentation, Stefan Ferger from Euronatur inquired about the graphs of success for the countries of the Balkan Peninsula, to which Mr. Andevski responded that they had been presented at the European Vulture Conference in Spain in 2023.

62. The Chairman then gave the floor to Mr. Cy Griffin, Senior Conservation Manager at the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE), to speak about 'Hunting Tourism: for better or worse'. He commenced his presentation by highlighting the challenges of effectively managing hunting tourism, particularly regarding ethical practices, sustainability, and adherence to national legislation. He noted that, in an ideal scenario, hunting tourism could enhance local economies and add value to wildlife. However, he stressed that it could also lead to negative outcomes, including illegal activities and overexploitation. Mr. Griffin provided a brief overview of FACE, stating that FACE's vision encompasses a European continent abundant in biodiversity and hunting opportunities. FACE was actively involved in MIKT and firmly opposed IKB by advocating for a "zero tolerance principle," as well as opposing all forms of wildlife crime. He referenced a 2004 FACE position paper, which stated that particular attention should be given to the hunting of migratory species, mainly birds, by foreign visitors, and noted that international coordination, monitoring, and management planning might be required. The paper emphasized that hunters visiting another country or region should behave as guests, and strictly adhere to all relevant legal and administrative hunting rules, while also respecting the traditions, customs, and socio-cultural sensitivities of local populations.
63. He emphasized the significance of the Bern Convention, praising both the Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity and the 2004 Recommendation of the Council of Europe regarding hunting tourism. Mr. Griffin highlighted the necessity for clearly articulated laws, devoid of ambiguity and open interpretation, as vague regulations were often exploited to their limits. He made it clear that hunters engaging in illegal activities against wildlife did not represent the values upheld by FACE.
64. Mr. Griffin shared insights from a study visit to Slovenia, conducted in collaboration with the European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL). This study demonstrated an effective control system based on shared responsibilities between hunting organizations and inspectors. The key to its success lied in the principle that animals belonged to the state, with ownership transferred to the local hunting organization or family after hunting, rather than to the individual hunter. The conclusion drawn was that this system inherently deterred illegal activities.
65. Following Mr. Griffin's presentation, Iván Ramírez from the CMS Secretariat asked if FACE had interactions with local hunting associations in the Balkans. He also inquired about any positions or concerns expressed by FACE members concerning hunting tourism. Mr. Griffin replied that discussions had taken place with both the Hunting Association in Montenegro and the authorities in Albania concerning hunting tourism. He emphasized that coordination with the Croatian association had improved and indicated that further meetings were planned in Slovenia. Additionally, it was noted that while hunting tourism was declining in Montenegro and Croatia, it was experiencing growth in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

66. Erald Xeka from the Albanian Ornithological Society (AOS) inquired whether FACE had any local representatives to monitor hunting tourism in the Balkans. Mr. Griffin clarified that FACE engaged with representatives at the national level rather than at the local level.
67. Bolesław Słociński from Biom asked about effective strategies to engage national hunters and associations in addressing illegal hunting tourism, as they often failed to recognize the severity of the issue. In response, Mr. Griffin suggested that mapping the challenges would be beneficial, as FACE currently lacked insight into the specific problematic areas. He emphasized the need to frame meetings and consultations with hunters in a way that highlights the benefits to them. Instead of merely soliciting their input during project discussions, it was essential to provide feedback on these consultations and ensure they understand the tangible actions and outcomes that result from their involvement.
68. Zydjon Vorpsi from the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) highlighted that the rule of law was not a strong point for many Balkan countries. Unfortunately, this had led to significant damage to Albania's biodiversity due to unregulated hunting tourism. He asked whether FACE would consider supporting a ban on hunting tourism in the Balkans until the critical issue of illegal hunting was addressed. Mr. Griffin responded by noting that Albania had already proposed such a ban, which ultimately resulted in a complete prohibition on hunting. He further emphasized that hunting tourism often conflicts with local hunting practices. As a potential solution, he suggested that tourist hunters could collaborate with local hunting associations, which could foster more sustainable hunting practices.
69. Claire Papazoglou from MIKT noted that examples of hunters travelling to other countries to hunt as many birds as possible (e.g. Cypriot hunters travelling to Greece) were well known. She asked whether FACE had an official position on promoting hunting quotas or limiting take in the host countries. In response, Mr. Griffin highlighted the necessity of establishing reasonable bag limits at the national level. He pointed to the ban on turtle doves as an example, explaining that in Greece, once the limit was reached, a message was sent within the hunting community. He also mentioned that FACE was currently updating its position on these issues, although this process was still in the early stages.
70. Stefan Ferger from Euronatur stated that whereas having a bag limit and technology to monitor it throughout the hunting period was important, enforcing the bag limit presented a different challenge. He raised concerns about the uncertainty of how many hunters would stop hunting upon receiving notification that the quota for a specific species had been reached. He emphasized that the responsibility for enforcement rests with the governments. In response, Mr. Griffin noted that game wardens and forestry inspectors were effectively enforcing these limits, highlighting that over 100,000 field inspections were conducted during the last season.

**8. Update on IKB in the Balkans – update from countries, including progress on IKB Action Plans including a discussion**

71. The Chairman proceeded to the next chapter of the workshop, during which representatives from the Balkan countries provided an update on issues related to IKB and the progress of NAP, followed by a discussion.

**8.1 Illegal killing of birds in Albania**

72. Mr. Erald Xeka from AOS began his presentation by noting that Albania ranks among the top ten worst countries for IKB, primarily due to hunting tourism. The primary demographic of foreign hunters was Italian, with their main target species being the Eurasian skylark (*Alauda arvensis*). In collaboration with NGOs and hunting associations, the government implemented hunting bans to help restore bird populations. The first ban was enforced from 2014 to 2016, followed by another from 2016 to 2021, and the third ban was currently active from 2022 to 2025. Mr. Xeka reported that the annual count for IKB in Albania ranges between 206 000 and 325 000 birds.
73. He highlighted that Albania underwent an inspection reform that divided jurisdiction among four institutions, which ultimately led to significant jurisdictional conflicts. This issue was worsened by a lack of protocol regarding wildlife crime and insufficient animal population counts. While hunting tourism had ceased, poaching had increased significantly, affecting species such as the goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), along with the common blackbird (*Turdus merula*) and common quail (*Coturnix coturnix*). AOS had established monitoring efforts in three black-spots and was also monitoring the black market in Tirana, Albania's capital, where songbirds were sold. It was found that some birds were being smuggled into Greece, where they were traded on the Athenian black market. Mr. Xeka mentioned a successful operation with border police and customs that intercepted a shipment of over 300 goldfinches. AOS also organized anti-poaching camps, bringing together all stakeholders near one of the black-spots. He emphasized that while AOS collaborates with some hunting societies to address the issue, communication remained problematic. He noted that illegal trade was also prevalent online, where endangered and protected species were sold; however, the cybercrime police unit was aware of this issue and had taken action against the perpetrators.
74. Regarding national legislation, some progress had been made with proposed amendments to the fauna law. One amendment was approved, leading to the establishment of a National Wildlife Council tasked with protecting wildlife and regulating hunting activities. The Wildlife Council had initiated systematic monitoring of black-spots and awareness-raising campaigns. Mr. Xeka reported that communication had somewhat deteriorated since the third hunting ban was implemented, but there were efforts underway to re-establish communication channels. He stressed that future plans aimed to enhance the legal framework for hunting and improve investigations into illegal bird killings and wildlife trafficking, which would necessitate training for relevant institutions.

75. Following Mr. Xeka's presentation, Boleslaw Słociński from Biom inquired whether the hunting ban had improved the situation. Xeka replied that while the AOS initially supported the ban, nearly ten years later, the results remained ambiguous. Although the government implemented the hunting ban as a drastic measure, the improvement of conditions during the ban was completely overlooked. Institutions seemed to assume that the measure itself would resolve the issue, which had not been the case. While hunting tourism ceased, the ban did not address the problem of local poachers.
76. Claire Papazoglou from MIKT highlighted that a similar hunting ban exists in Lebanon, where a key negative outcome had been a lack of enforcement, training and prioritization, which led to deterioration of the situation. The prolonged absence of hunting permits had left potential hunters unfamiliar with the hunting legislation, firearms, species, and conservation. She cautioned that a hunting ban was not a panacea, and had to be approached with care and vigilance.
77. The Chairman mentioned that the primary demographic of hunting tourists in Montenegro were Italians, a trend observed in most Balkan countries. He noted that there had been attempts to smuggle rock partridge across the border into Italy, leading to a moratorium that aided in the recovery of their population.
78. Jovana Janjušević from CZIP reported that in Montenegro, the hunting ban on certain species, particularly the rock partridge, had been highly successful. The three-year moratorium issued by the Ministry of Agriculture of Montenegro had led to the recovery of the rock partridge population.
79. Mladen Ćabak from the Hunting Association of Montenegro stated that the absence of hunters leads to numerous illegal activities against wildlife, asserting that a total hunting ban would be the most detrimental measure. He noted that there are several effective laws, bylaws, and action plans established that merely require adherence and proper enforcement.
80. Cy Griffin from FACE inquired whether the National Wildlife Council of Albania had the authority to discuss new hunting legislation. Mr. Xeka affirmed that amendments to the hunting legislation could be included in the Council's meeting agenda for discussion.
81. Zydjon Vorpsi from PPNEA expressed concern over the potential for a false sense of success regarding the Rome Strategic Plan's goal of a 50% reduction in illegal killings of birds if the measurement relied solely on bird populations. He worried that a decline in bird populations may not correlate with a decrease in poaching activity. Mr. Vorpsi emphasized that the targets of the RSP should align proportionately with the existing bird populations in each country. He also highlighted the role of the National Wildlife Council, noting that, while it had the mandate to discuss issues, it lacked an active role in amending national legislation. He believed that, although having all stakeholders unified was beneficial, the Council should be empowered to influence the legislative process and exert pressure on

Albanian authorities. Lastly, he acknowledged that while the hunting ban helped mitigate the negative effects of hunting tourism, it inadvertently worsened the situation by fostering a new generation of would-be hunters. He stressed that any removal of the hunting ban should be approached with extreme caution, as he feared the consequences could be disastrous, potentially leading to a situation far worse than what existed in 2016 when the first ban was implemented.

## 8.2 Illegal killing of birds in Bosnia and Herzegovina

82. Ms. Nermina Sarajlić from the Ornithological Society Naše Ptice began her presentation by noting that her country regrettably had a long tradition of IKB, mentioning as a point of interest that its first ornithologist was a poacher. Poaching had gained prominence over the past 50 years, particularly influenced by the wartime period in the 1990s. It was highlighted that the primary demographic of hunting tourists was Italian; however, the situation had improved since Croatia's accession to the EU, which led to stricter border controls. Regarding main methods used for IKB, Ms. Sarajlić stated that nearly all main methods had been documented, with electronic devices being the most prominent. Due to the geographical scope of IKB projects being tailored to specific national hotspots, comprehensive national data on IKB remained unavailable. In the Hutovo Blato Nature Park, which was once an IKB hotspot, awareness-raising campaigns and regular monitoring had led to an increase in waterfowl populations.
83. Ms. Sarajlić identified several drivers of IKB including pest control, recreation, superstition, taxidermy, self-consumption (especially in the southern regions), and smuggling. She noted that in some underdeveloped areas of the country, IKB served as the sole means of sustenance, whether for personal use or sale. She also pointed out that even the Minister of Education had contributed to the issue by publicly inviting hunters to kill crows in urban areas. The main perpetrators of IKB included unemployed citizens, hunting tourists, restaurant owners (who support IKB by catering to demand), fishermen, farmers, pigeon enthusiasts, and individuals engaging in it for sport. The online sale of protected species had also been documented; however, the issue remained unresolved due to a complex jurisdictional framework stemming from Bosnia and Herzegovina's tripartite government structure. Since 2012, reports had recorded 532 individual cases of IKB affecting 103 bird species, with the common quail being the most frequently impacted. Ms. Sarajlić praised the collaboration between the Ornithological Society Naše Ptice and local hunting organizations, stating that their combined efforts were working against poachers.
84. Conversely, the inspectorate rarely responds, and court cases were often deprioritized. She emphasized that there had been virtually no convictions for IKB to date. Ms. Sarajlić noted the absence of a NAP, although a draft existed. Formal acceptance of the draft required action from the Council of Ministers, but the NAP was not viewed as a priority. The government did not conduct any systematic bird monitoring, relying solely on the findings of the Ornithological Society Naše Ptice organization, which was insufficient as it concentrated on hotspots rather than encompassing the entire country.

85. After Ms. Sarajlić's presentation, Iván Ramírez from the CMS Secretariat inquired about the next steps for the NAP. Ms. Sarajlić responded that a government authority had to first review the draft and even after that review, additional time was required, as many documents were pending adoption by the Council of Ministers, and the NAP was not even in that queue.
86. Claire Papazoglou from MIKT asked whether Nada Mlinar, the Executive Assistant for International Cooperation in the Environmental Department of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as government expert, could provide further clarification on the IKB NAP. In reply, Ms. Mlinar indicated that AEWA was currently in the process of ratification. She noted that before the NAP could be adopted at the national level, a meeting with representatives from the country's entities had to be organized, given the potential differences in their laws and the need for the NAP to be coherent. Ms. Mlinar also mentioned that once the ratification process for AEWA was complete, the adoption of the national action plan could be scheduled.
87. Jovan Andevski from VCF expressed his surprise that both Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina regarded the illegal poisoning of birds as a separate issue from the rest of the IKB. He noted that the same stakeholders were involved in both matters. In response, Ms. Sarajlić indicated that it was likely the two issues would be integrated in the future, but emphasized that their primary focus currently was on birds that were illegally shot, as the species known to be susceptible to poisoning (vultures) were now extinct in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
88. Uroš Pantović from VCF stated that the road map for wildlife poisoning in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was created in the scope of the BalkanDetox LIFE by Naše ptice and relevant stakeholders had been drafted and submitted for final review at the entity level, and this process could also facilitate the adoption of the IKB NAP.

### 8.3 Illegal killing of birds in Croatia

89. Ms. Marija Martinko Ivanov, from Biom Association, explained that her presentation had been jointly prepared with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Green Transition (MEPGT). Ms. Martinko Ivanov noted that Ms. Ivana Jelenić, Head of the Biodiversity Sector of MEPGT, would be joining the meeting online. Ms. Ivana Jelenić greeted participants online. Ms. Martinko Ivanov emphasized the strong collaboration between MEPGT and Biom on tackling wildlife crime since 2021, which resulted in the creation of a Standardized Operational Protocol for cases of illegal poisoning and other illegal actions against wildlife. Furthermore, this strong collaboration led to the initialization of the development of a NAP to combat wildlife crime in January 2024.
90. Ms. Martinko Ivanov stated that the situation regarding IKB in Croatia mirrored that of neighboring countries, with primary motives for illegal shooting and trapping being self-interest (hunting tourism, trade, meat), tradition (trapping, waterfowl game delicacies) and wildlife conflicts. Regarding hunting tourism, Ms. Martinko Ivanov highlighted quail

poaching, citing approximately 40,000 birds illegally shot each year, linking this to traditional consumption in Italy and unrealistic quotas set by local hunting organizations. She also addressed waterfowl poaching on carp fishponds, which included a significant number of protected species, and breached quotas for woodcock and snipe.

91. Regarding traditions, she pointed out that bird trapping was prevalent in Dalmatia, where songbirds were trapped using rock traps and limesticks. Croatia faced challenges including illegal killing of birds with a significant IKB hotspot in the Neretva River delta, where poaching in the ornithological reserves is a daily event. Biom has conducted a socio-economic analysis which confirmed that the main driver for the poaching in the Neretva delta is a strong local tradition of consumption of the meat of Coot and ducks.
92. Regarding illegal poisoning, Ms. Martinko Ivanov identified motives such as conflicts with predatory species or introduced animals, misuse of rodenticides, and non-compliance with the lead shot ban, which hunters frequently disregard. Wildlife poisoning is frequent on Kvarner islands (driven by conflicts with wild boar and golden jackal), Dalmatia and Lika (conflicts with wolves and jackals) and Lonjsko polje nature park (jackal). Conflicts with wolves are often deepened by sensationalist media coverage.
93. She noted the national authorities' lack of capacity and experience, compounded by insufficient communication and collaboration between governmental institutions and law enforcement agencies. Lastly, Ms. Martinko Ivanov pointed out that public prosecutors and judges often lacked awareness of wildlife crime and considered it a low priority. Nonetheless, an unofficial national anti-wildlife crime working group had been established, coordinating wildlife crime cases with dedicated individuals from governmental institutions and NGOs. Recently, wildlife crime cases had garnered increased attention from the Croatian police.
94. She emphasized that Croatia was actively working on enhancing capabilities for NAP development through various projects and workshops (such as LIFE against bird crime, Adriatic Flyway, LIFE SWiPE, and BalkanDetox LIFE). Through the BalkanDetox LIFE project, a Standard Operational Protocol for coordination in cases of illegal poisoning and other illegal actions against wildlife had been developed in November 2023. She also praised the formation of the NAP Committee, scheduled for its first meeting in early autumn 2024, which would focus on stakeholder engagement, workflow finalization, additional stakeholder analysis, document structure and objectives, and international or regional collaborations.
95. Following Ms. Martinko Ivanov's presentation, Jovan Andevski from the VCF reflected on his earlier comment about integrating the issue of illegal wildlife poisoning with the broader context of IKB, which Croatia had undertaken.



#### 8.4 Illegal killing of birds in North Macedonia

96. Mr. Metodija Veleviski, Deputy Director of the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES), opened his presentation by noting that North Macedonia had undertaken numerous legislative amendments in its efforts towards EU accession. He mentioned that a new law on nature protection was being drafted, along with legislation to regulate the international trade of protected species. Mr. Veleviski highlighted that since 2018, North Macedonia had adopted a National Strategy for Nature Protection and an accompanying Action Plan, as well as a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, which expired in 2023. Mr. Veleviski stated that the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan provided a legal framework for the IKB NAP.
97. Regarding protected areas, he emphasized that 13.9% of the territory was currently under protection, with three additional protected areas established in recent years. National parks accounted for approximately 6.91% of the country's total area, followed by nature monuments at 3.0%. The remaining categories of protected areas collectively covered about 4.01% of the territory. This information was important for IKB, as hunting was prohibited within protected areas, with the exception of national parks, where hunting could be permitted (at the time of the meeting, one national park administration did allow hunting). Additionally, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, had identified twelve potential areas for NATURA 2000 sites.
98. The primary institutional stakeholders in North Macedonia were the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Economy. The country had established robust national legislation governing the use of toxic substances in the environment. Notably, the use of poison baits was banned in 1985, and wildlife poisoning was an illegal activity penalized under Criminal Law. Several laws in North Macedonia specifically addressed animal protection and welfare, and directly referenced wildlife poisoning, or regulated the use of toxic substances in agriculture and the broader environment. Mr. Veleviski noted several pertinent laws and regulations, including the Hunting Law, the Law on Nature Protection, the Law on Plant Product Protection, the Law on the Protection and Welfare of Animals, and the Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia. He emphasized that international legislation was fully integrated into national law. He praised the institutions that maintained records of all legally processed cases of wildlife poisoning. Additionally, MES monitored poisoning incidents and cases of raptor mortality over the past 30 years. According to their data, there had been no recorded incidents of wildlife poisoning from 2021-2024.
99. However, a significant gap in addressing this issue was the lack of forensic toxicology analysis, which had only been conducted in two cases—both of which confirmed the presence of methomyl in the cadavers. This deficiency in forensic analysis was attributed to insufficient equipment and manpower within the relevant national laboratories. On a positive note, anti-poisoning workshops and educational lectures had been conducted for a range of stakeholders, including police, prosecutors, inspectorates, veterinary

professionals, farmers, and community members since 2006. The National Action Plan aimed at combating illegal poisoning had been drafted by the National Working Group but was currently awaiting official approval.

100. Mr. Veleviski also addressed the issue of poaching, noting that while it was less documented, it remained a concern in North Macedonia. The primary problems included the killing of protected species, poaching within protected areas, and the use of decoys. This issue closely aligned with regional trends, particularly involving Italian hunters. He emphasized that the extent of poaching was likely much more significant than reported, primarily due to insufficient data resulting from a lack of field resources. Additionally, Mr. Veleviski highlighted a decline in the population of the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), which he believed could be linked to pigeon-keeping practices and the conflict that sometimes arose between pigeon keepers and peregrine falcons. He pointed out that the spring hunting season lasted at least one month longer than it should, closing on April 1st, and some bird species listed on international red lists were still classified as huntable. There were no questions or comments following the conclusion of Mr. Veleviski's presentation.

#### 8.5 Illegal killing of birds in Serbia

101. Miloš Radaković, Senior Expert Associate in the Department of Biodiversity, Ecological Networks and Sustainable Development at the Institute for Nature Conservation, began his presentation with a brief overview of the Institute's history, which was organized across three offices. He highlighted the various relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), the Nature Protection Inspection Unit, and a CITES office. Additionally, he noted the establishment of the Environmental Crime Police Unit, which was formed in 2022.
102. He emphasized the significance of several key laws, including the Law on Nature Protection, the Law on Game and Hunting, and the Criminal Code of Serbia, as well as various bylaws. Among the most important of these are the Rulebook on Cross-Border Traffic and Trade of Protected Species, and the Rulebook on the Declaration and Protection of Strictly Protected and Protected Wild Species of Plants, Animals, and Fungi. In terms of the international legal framework, Serbia was a signatory to the Ramsar Convention, the Bern Convention, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, and AEWA. He noted that in 2016, the Institute organized several workshops and meetings aimed at developing a protocol or action plan for the conservation of wild species. In 2018, a workshop organized by VCF further improved upon the 2016 protocol. Concerning the field situation, expert support was being provided by MEP, the CITES office, and the Inspection Unit, while the Institute contributed scientific opinions on wild species. He also highlighted collaboration with the Environmental Crime Police Unit and public prosecutors.
103. The shortage of rescue and rehabilitation centers (zoos) for wild species was a well-recognized issue, compounded by a lack of experience and knowledge at the existing facilities. He also noted the critically low number of environmental protection inspectors and the inadequate enforcement and punitive measures for environmental crimes and

violations. To illustrate his point, he mentioned an ongoing case involving a griffon vulture that was found shot in the Uvac Special Nature Reserve. Although the bird survived despite being hit by numerous lead pellets, the perpetrator had yet to be identified. Additionally, in the same region, a dead griffon vulture was discovered, with pathological examinations revealing that avian tuberculosis was the cause of death. Using this example, Mr. Radaković emphasized that not all wildlife mortality cases were attributed to direct human actions or illegal activities. He further stated that the Serbian government had resolved to develop a national plan addressing IKB as part of the EU accession process under Chapter 27.

104. Following the conclusion of Mr. Radaković's presentation, Slobodan Marković from the Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia (BPSSS) shared important information regarding data collection on IKB in Serbia. He emphasized that the absence of a standardized protocol posed significant challenges in addressing wildlife poisoning, with approximately 10 to 15 cases reported annually. Mr. Marković also highlighted a notable incident from May 2024, in which nearly 1,000 birds were poisoned in a single day. Moreover, he pointed out that the illegal trapping and trading of birds in Southern Serbia was leading to the disappearance of at least 50,000 birds each year. Poaching was also discussed as a major concern, with an estimated 50,000 common quails being illegally lured by electronic callers and shot every summer. While he noted that poaching and trapping were crimes that the prosecution recognized occasionally, he stressed that prosecuting wildlife poisoning cases was particularly challenging due to the lack of a formal protocol. However, he expressed optimism over the increasing interest among public prosecutors in Serbia, as many were signing up for workshops focused on wildlife crime.
105. Uroš Pantović from VCF asked whether Mr. Radaković had any direct experience working with the environmental crime police unit, and if so, whether he was satisfied with their performance. Mr. Radaković stated that although collaboration with the environmental inspection could be improved, the relationship between the Institute and the environmental crime police unit was strong. He noted that it was common for the environmental crime police unit to seek expert opinions from the Institute. Additionally, Mr. Radaković praised the partnership between the Institute and the BPSSS.

## **9. The Theory of Change: A structured basis for National Action Planning**

106. Stefan Ferger, Deputy Head of Nature Conservation and Project Manager at EuroNatur, began his presentation by emphasizing that the theory of change was an integral part of the larger project cycle. He noted that he would discuss it within the framework of conservation standards. Ferger defined project standards as the essential framework for project planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, with the theory of change specifically related to the planning phase.
107. To properly position the theory of change, he explained that the assessment stage of the conservation standards had to be addressed first. That involved analyzing the situation—a

process that enabled the project team to establish a shared understanding of the context, thus fostering clarity regarding the existing problems. The mandatory step in that process was best illustrated through a graphic representation of the situation analysis, which depicted cause-and-effect relationships, identified key stakeholders, reflected the current state, promoted common understanding, and ultimately informed the theory of change.

108. Mr. Ferger described the theory of change as a series of causally linked assumptions regarding how a team believed its actions would lead to both intermediate results and longer-term conservation objectives. He highlighted the importance of a results chain, which visually represented the theory of change, capturing core assumptions and linking interventions to targets—specifically, a series of causal interventions expected to yield intermediate outcomes (for example, “if we enforce the law, then tour operators will comply”).
109. He stressed that a well-constructed results chain should be results-oriented, causally linked, demonstrative of change, and reasonably complete, yet straightforward. He presented several examples of result chains within the context of the IKB, noting that there was no definitive right or wrong approach, as all models merely serve as representations. Additionally, he mentioned the availability of tools and support for this practice, including software, manuals, and training resources,<sup>5</sup> which had been translated to the regional language of the Balkan Peninsula. As for the tools, Miradi desktop and Miradi share<sup>6</sup> software were recommended.
110. After Mr. Ferger’s presentation concluded, Ms. Arianna Aradis from ISPRA addressed the previously mentioned issue of Italian hunting tourists, which appeared to be affecting the entire region. She wondered whether it would be more appropriate to address this issue in Italy or in the countries where these hunters were causing problems. In response, Mr. Ferger explained that the workshop aimed to develop a NAP for each individual country, during which problems related to hunting tourism would be identified. He further noted that one possible action could involve raising awareness at a bilateral level between the ministries of tourism in Italy and the countries experiencing issues with illegal activities from Italian hunting tourists.
111. Concluding the first day of the workshop, Iván Ramírez noted that explaining conservation standards can often be more challenging than implementing them. He encouraged all participants to engage with the methodology of conservation standards, highlighting their value, particularly in refining ideas. He also cautioned against lengthy brainstorming sessions and perfectionism, which can lead to fatigue among participants.

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<sup>5</sup> Found on <https://conservationstandards.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Available on <https://www.miradishare.org/>

## 10. Summarizing Day 1

112. The Chairman opened the second day of the workshop and invited Ms. Claire Papazoglou to summarize the previous day's discussions, effectively setting the stage for the day's activities. Following her recap, instructions were provided to the participants. It was noted that during the breakout sessions, two groups would be formed: one group would communicate in the regional languages of the Balkan Peninsula, comprising participants from Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia (referred to as Group 1), while the other group would operate in English and include participants from Albania, Croatia, and North Macedonia, along with additional experts and guests (referred to as Group 2). Both groups would focus on the same themes, starting with a session dedicated to addressing questions related to the development of the NAP, followed by a second session focused on the implementation and monitoring of the NAP. Finally, all participants were instructed to reconvene for a joint session, where the group facilitators would present their findings to the plenary.

### 10.1 Breakout Group: Developing a National IKB Action Plan

113. It was decided that Jovan Andevski from VCF<sup>7</sup> would serve as the facilitator for Group 1. He opened the session by assigning roles: Uroš Pantović from VCF as the notetaker, Nermina Sarajlić from the Ornithological Society Naše Ptice as the timekeeper, and Davor Marković as the group reporter. Group 1 comprised representatives from Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with an observer from Croatia. The Facilitator explained that the purpose of the breakout session was to address any issues or questions related to the development of the national action plans and to provide guidance on the process. He noted that the group would receive a set of questions to which participants would respond, representing their respective countries. The Facilitator emphasized that while the development of the NAP possibly seemed challenging, it was not as daunting as it appeared, provided that the methodology was followed. He stressed that, in his view, the NAP itself was not the primary objective; rather, the goal was to ensure the active engagement of all parties involved throughout the process.

114. Below are the answers provided to the questions presented to the two groups.

### 115. **Question 1: Do you think that your country needs an IKB National Action Plan?**

116. **Montenegro:** Marija Šoškić from CZIP stated that the adoption of the NAP was an obligation of the Government of Montenegro and would be highly beneficial in preventing issues when they arise. She emphasized that CZIP has faced challenges for many years in reporting poaching incidents, as the police had claimed that addressing illegal hunting fell

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<sup>7</sup> The Facilitator thereafter

outside their jurisdiction.<sup>8</sup> The Facilitator highlighted that, apart from an NAP, Montenegro would need an operative protocol as well. Mladen Ćabak, Secretary of the Hunting association of Montenegro, answered that though the reported number of birds affected by IKB may differ between different stakeholders, the problem existed and that adoption of the IKB NAP was the best solution as it would cover all the stakeholders. He also pointed out that the Hunting association of Montenegro would do everything in its power to assist in the development of such an action plan.

117. **Serbia:** Miloš Radaković, from the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia, stated that development of the NAP was mandatory only if it was recognized as mandatory by a national law or regulation, while everything else could become a recommendation. He agreed that Serbia did require an IKB NAP. The Facilitator emphasized the CMS resolutions listed by Ms. Claire Papazoglou in her presentation, noting that all of these resolutions<sup>9</sup> were discussed and voted at CMS COPs.
118. **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Nada Mlinar from the Environmental Department at the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, expressed her agreement on the necessity of an IKB NAP for the country. She noted that there was currently a lot of aimless wandering in the processes of reporting and jurisdiction. Ms. Mlinar emphasized the invaluable role of the NGO Ornithological Society Naše Ptice in supporting the institution she represented, highlighting the mutual understanding and collaboration that had been established. She remarked that the inspectorates had to take a more active role, as to the best of her knowledge no actions had been taken by them following the reports. Additionally, she pointed out that representatives from the inspectorate and police had to attend workshops and training sessions. Finally, she underscored the importance of raising awareness, stating that in every legislative process - whether at the national or regional level - the opinions of all relevant institutions were needed.
119. Nermina Sarajlić from the Ornithological Society Naše Ptice emphasized that Bosnia and Herzegovina, unlike other countries in the region, possessed an extremely complex national administration. This administration was divided among three entities, each with its own government, and within each entity, there could be up to ten cantons, all of which also maintained their own local governments. She highlighted the challenges in having anything declared at a national level due to this fragmented distribution of political power.
120. When the Facilitator inquired about the number of NAPs needed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ms. Sarajlić explained that, following the successful development of an anti-poisoning action plan, the most effective approach would be to develop two NAPs for IKB. It was agreed that the requirement for multiple NAPs was a unique characteristic of Bosnia

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<sup>8</sup> Article 325 of the Criminal Code of Montenegro addresses illegal hunting, making its prevention and investigation part of police responsibilities. Consequently, it can be concluded that, in accordance with Article 10 of the Law on Internal Affairs, police are obligated to respond to calls or criminal reports. Thus, a refusal by police officers to act in cases of illegal hunting is unlawful.

<sup>9</sup> CMS Resolution 11.15 Preventing Poisoning of Migratory Birds; Resolution 11.17 African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Action Plan (AEMLAP); Resolution 11.18 Saker Falcon Global Action Plan; and the Resolution 12.10 Conservation of African-Eurasian Vultures.

and Herzegovina's administrative structure, whereas a single NAP would be sufficient for all other countries in the region.

121. After the facilitator's inquiry, representatives from all countries agreed that the development of the anti-poisoning action plan should be included in the IKB NAP. They noted that wildlife poisoning incidents primarily impact bird species, which are often the main victims of both intentional and accidental poisoning.
122. **Question 2: Do the countries have legal basis for the adoption of the NAP?**
123. Montenegro: Mladen Čabak, stated that while there were legal foundations for the protection of certain species, he remained uncertain about the legal basis for the NAP. Anela Sijarić explained that the Government of Montenegro prepared an annual Action Plan, and the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development was required to align national legislation with EU legislation and the recommendations of international conventions to which Montenegro was a signatory. She referenced the Montenegrin Law on Nature Protection, emphasizing that this law served as the legal framework for the IKB NAP. Consequently, the development of the NAP had been officially incorporated into the Government's Action Plan for 2024, making the creation and implementation of the NAP a commitment that the Montenegrin Government had to fulfill by the end of that year.
124. **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Nermina Sarajlić stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina lacked the legal foundation needed for the development of the NAP. Nada Mlinar, noted that the Ornithological Society Naše Ptice proposed the development of a NAP to the authorities of the three entities. She explained that all entities were expected to provide their input and that a working committee comprising representatives from the relevant governmental authorities should be established. While she acknowledged that it was unlikely, she mentioned the possibility that the entities could decide against the development of the NAP due to the absence of a legal basis. The Facilitator reminded everyone that the resolutions of the CMS could serve as a legal foundation.
125. **Serbia:** Miloš Radaković emphasized that following Recommendation 205 (2019) from the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention,<sup>10</sup> which relates to the RSP, the Government of Serbia had officially adopted a Conclusion outlining the relevant Ministries responsible for the development of the NAP. He stressed that this document served as the legal foundation for all actions related to the NAP. Mr. Radaković expressed optimism, stating that this was a strong starting point. He hoped that further progress in this area would emerge through the workshop report he planned to write upon his return to Serbia.
126. **Question 3: What are the requirements for formal procedure of NAP preparation?**

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<sup>10</sup> Available on <https://rm.coe.int/2019-rec-205e-ikb/1680993e0c>

127. The Facilitator noted that the initial step in preparing the NAP typically involved forming a working group composed of various governmental stakeholders responsible for addressing the issue of illegal killing of birds. He then asked the participants about the legal procedures for developing the NAP in their respective countries.
128. Montenegro: Mladen Ćabak emphasized the importance of carefully identifying all stakeholders involved in the process. Anela Sijarić responded that the official invitations for institutional stakeholders had been prepared. However, due to the recent government restructuring, they had not yet been sent out. In her discussion on stakeholder enlistment, she mentioned various entities, including the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education, the Hunting Association of Montenegro, the civil sector, managers of all protected areas, customs administration, police administration, the Agency for Nature Protection, and the environmental and hunting inspectorates. Ms. Sijarić expressed regret that many stakeholders did not attend the workshop, despite having been invited in a timely manner. She noted that this workshop was intended to introduce the official process of NAP development and confirmed that progress on the plan, which she was drafting alongside Ms. Šoškić from CZIP, was currently at the halfway mark. She emphasized that further steps would require the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.
129. The Facilitator inquired about the role of public prosecutors in the development of the NAP. Ms. Sijarić explained that members of the Supreme Court did not attend the workshop, despite registering, and that representatives from the prosecutor's office indicated they did not have time to participate. The Facilitator highlighted the critical role of the public prosecutors in the development process.
130. Jovana Janjušević, Executive Director of CZIP, pointed out that based on her previous experience, action plans or protocols often lack budgetary allocations. Instead, they tend to be viewed as political maneuvers, milestones, or mere checkmarks in the EU accession process, rather than actionable documents in need of implementation and monitoring. In response, Ms. Sijarić affirmed that the Montenegrin NAP would be budgeted, although it remained uncertain how the Ministry of Finance would respond, as their approval would be essential. Ms. Šoškić added that the budget for the NAP could be distributed among various governmental institutions.
131. Aleksandar Perović, an advisor at the EPA, pointed out that it took four years of advocacy to establish the Council for developing management plans for the conservation and management of brown bears and wolves in Montenegro. Ms. Sijarić noted that the process was prolonged more than anticipated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and frequent changes in governmental structures. Mr. Perović, however, countered that the government continued to hold weekly sessions even during the pandemic. Ms. Sijarić expressed her belief that there would not be further delays in the adoption of the NAP, though she acknowledged potential issues arising from the lack of involvement of decision-makers within the judiciary. When asked about the consequences of the NAP not being formally adopted by the end of



the year, Ms. Sijarić stated that, in the worst-case scenario, it would become part of the Government's 2025 Action Plan, which would be seen as a significant missed opportunity for the Government.

132. **Serbia:** Miloš Radaković highlighted that, although it may not hold the same significance as a NAP on IKB, a protocol was established in 2016 with stakeholders. He considered the protocol a strong foundation for the development of the NAP.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Radaković emphasized the importance of an active role for the NGOs, as well as for inspectorates, the environmental crime police unit, wildlife sanctuaries, and the Institute for Nature Conservation. The Facilitator inquired whether an NGO had been involved in the development of the aforementioned protocol. Mr. Radaković responded that representatives from NGOs were part of the working group that created the draft protocol. He further noted that the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications, Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Interior, and Ministry of Economy – Customs Administration were responsible for developing a NAP.
133. The Facilitator raised the problems that occurred during the formation of a national anti-poisoning working group in Serbia. Uroš Pantović from VCF acknowledged that there was indeed a problem with gathering stakeholders to establish the working group. He emphasized that, apart from the Provincial Institute of Nature Conservation, no other institution had taken an active role in its formation. As a result, the anti-poisoning working group had not been established. The Facilitator noted that, at the very least, an unofficial working group for the development of the anti-poisoning NAP had been formed. In response, Slobodan Marković from BirdLife Serbia indicated that that unofficial group would present a draft. The Facilitator emphasized that an uncertainty remained regarding the official recognition by the MEP. Uroš Pantović from VCF expressed skepticism about the likelihood of this version of the NAP being adopted by the MEP.
134. Slobodan Marković from BPSSS emphasized that recommendations concerning the protocol matrix of legal jurisdiction had been submitted to the MEP. This matrix specified which governmental institutions, enforcement agencies, and prosecutor's office would need to take action in different IKB situations, putting the emphasis on all the relevant stakeholders. However, no steps had been taken to form a working group, as relevant governmental stakeholders did not see it as a priority. Regarding the budgeting for the NAP, Mr. Radaković noted that insufficient funding remained a significant issue in Serbia. As for the formal adoption of the NAP's final version, Mr. Radaković indicated that the process could be lengthy. Nonetheless, if there was sufficient interest and compelling arguments, it

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<sup>11</sup> Draft Protocol for Action and Cooperation of Authorities and Organizations in Combating Illegal Killing, Capture and Trade in Wild Animal Species including the Tunis Action Plan (2011-2020) was mentioned during the 6th Meeting of the Group of Experts on the Conservation of Birds in a presentation by an official of the Serbian Ministry of Environmental Protection. The presentation is available on the website of the Council of Europe, on the following link: <https://rm.coe.int/implementation-of-the-tunis-action-plan-2013-2020-in-serbia/1680730d3a>

could be formally recognized and adopted in a single government session, highlighting that the core issue lies in a lack of political will.

135. **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Nermina Sarajlić from the Ornithological Society Naše Ptice lamented the fact that the civil society organizations were not taken seriously by the administration. She emphasized that although the stakeholders had been thoroughly identified and formally invited to meetings, attendance was consistently low; typically, only one or two of the fifty intended participants showed up. Ms. Sarajlić also noted occasions when scheduled meetings were to take place at government institutions, but the host was absent when the meeting was supposed to begin. Furthermore, she highlighted that the frequent changes in government hindered progress, as signed commitments did not carry over to subsequent administrations.
136. The Facilitator stressed that ideally the government should be responsible for coordinating the national workforce and guiding the drafting process of an IKB NAP rather than the NGOs. Nada Mlinar echoed the sentiment regarding frequent government changes. She noted that while upper management or ministry heads could change, most government employees remained in their positions. The Facilitator reiterated that initiatives should originate from government institutions—in this case, the coordinators for NAP development—rather than from NGOs. Uroš Pantović from VCF pointed out a similar issue in Serbia, noting that although it was clear that governmental structures should take the lead, it was unlikely to happen, given that institutions have been unresponsive for years regarding the IKB.
137. When it comes to budgeting for the NAP, Ms. Mlinar stated that governmental institutions lacked funds designated for environmental issues, often relying on project-based financing. Regarding the formal adoption of the final version of the NAP, she mentioned that a draft had been pending with the government for a year and a half, seemingly waiting for more favorable conditions, as environmental issues were currently not prioritized. In reality, the governments within Bosnia and Herzegovina could approve the document in a single session, after which a notification would be sent to the Council of Ministers. She expressed skepticism about any progress being made over the next two years.
138. Ms. Sarajlić concurred that it was unlikely the NAP would be adopted in the next two years and reflected on the potential for public and media pressure to advance the NAP, noting that while the media frequently reports on Bosnia and Herzegovina's failure to ratify the AEWa agreement, these stories tended to fade from public attention within days.
139. It was unanimously concluded that in all countries the NAP should go through the phase of public review. It was also unanimously concluded that all the countries should be following the Guidance for the development and implementation of NAP against the IKB of the CMS Secretariat and Bern Convention.

**140. Question 4: Implementation of the National Action Plan**

141. The Facilitator emphasized that the most critical aspect following the development and adoption of the NAP was its implementation and monitoring. He noted that a well-crafted document held little value if it was not put into action. He then requested representatives from the respective countries to provide a summary of their NAP implementation processes. Additionally, the Facilitator inquired about how often the steering committee sessions occurred and what mechanisms were in place to ensure stakeholder compliance with the plan.
142. Serbia: Miloš Radaković expressed his expectation that the same working group would oversee both the development and implementation of the NAP. He mentioned uncertainty regarding the precise process, but indicated that the Ministry of Environmental Protection was likely to serve as the main coordinator. When asked about the frequency of steering committee sessions, Mr. Radaković stated he was unsure, but suggested it would be reasonable to expect at least one meeting per year.
143. Slobodan Marković from BPSSS and Uroš Pantović from the VCF agreed that only the Government could ensure successful implementation, as the implementation of measures to combat the IKB required effective enforcement mechanisms. However, they expressed concern that even ratified international agreements and recommendations were not consistently adhered to in practice.
144. Regarding capacity building, Davor Marković, a wildlife crime expert with experience in the BalkanDetox LIFE and Adriatic Flyway projects, emphasized the importance of in-person meetings with public prosecutors. While digital communication methods like email, letters, and phone calls could be efficient, they often fell short in building understanding and capacity. He noted that such meetings required a significant time commitment, but could lead to the establishment of an informal network of public prosecutors who had a deep understanding of wildlife crime issues and were committed to addressing them seriously. He exemplified successful collaboration with Ms. Nena Miloradović Bjelica, a senior assistant prosecutor and national judiciary champion for wildlife crime in Serbia.
145. Slobodan Marković highlighted the effectiveness of workshops led by Ms. Miloradović Bjelica, which significantly improved coordination and collaboration between BPSSS and public prosecutors in Serbia. Uroš Pantović also noted the significant impact of the WCA on public prosecutors, providing them with insight into the effort involved in investigating wildlife crimes. Furthermore, participants in the wildlife crime workshops had become key resources for their colleagues, demonstrating the value of this approach.
146. **Montenegro:** Anela Sijarić stated that the Ministry of Environmental Protection would serve as the main coordinator. Other governmental stakeholders would adhere to the individual actions outlined in the NAP referring to them and would implement the necessary measures while reporting back to the Ministry. She noted that plans were in place for a larger group

of stakeholders to participate in the development of the NAP, followed by the formation of a Standing Committee, which would consist solely of government representatives, once the NAP was formally adopted. The primary responsibility for this Committee would be to oversee and enforce the implementation of the plan.

147. Regarding the frequency of Standing Committee meetings, Ms. Sijarić indicated that one session per year was insufficient, advocating for more frequent gatherings. She emphasized that the IKB occurred daily, suggesting the committee should meet between two to four times per year. Additionally, she proposed that intergovernmental exchanges of NAPs could enhance regional efforts to combat the IKB. The Facilitator pointed out that establishing a special regional committee could be particularly beneficial to the Balkan Peninsula.
148. As for mechanisms to ensure the implementation of the NAP, Ms. Sijarić mentioned that political accountability could play a role. However, she reiterated the lack of engagement from judicial institutions and noted that recommendations from international bodies were consistently enforced. Jovana Janjušević highlighted shortcomings within the judiciary system, identifying public prosecutors as a significant obstacle. An analysis of reports related to IKB revealed a critically low percentage of cases that progress to the trial stage, regardless of the quality of the investigation or the availability of irrefutable evidence. While some public prosecutors approached wildlife crime with seriousness, their numbers remain minimal. Ms. Janjušević also mentioned a statistical red-alert mechanism that activates whenever an unusually high number of cases in a specific area of the legal system were being dismissed. Once triggered, the Office of the Supreme Prosecution closely monitored the workflow of the basic prosecution. Nevertheless, she noted that despite the existence of this mechanism, the issue persists.
149. **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Ms. Nada Mlinar stated that the working group would engage with all stakeholders to establish a Committee supervised by the Ministry of Environmental Protection. She mentioned that the steering committee meetings would be held at a regional (Bosnia and Herzegovina) level, emphasizing the importance of monitoring and adopting best practices from other countries in the region. She concluded that the NAP should encompass the implementation process as well. Regarding the mechanisms for enforcing this implementation, Ms. Mlinar noted the absence of formal mechanisms for governmental institutions. Nermina Sarajlić from the Ornithological Society Naše Ptice further pointed out that public prosecutors in Bosnia and Herzegovina were seen as an obstacle, due to insufficient understanding of the problem.
150. **Question 5: Evaluation and monitoring of the results of a National Action Plan**
151. The Facilitator raised a question about the monitoring and evaluation system for the actions and measures implemented under the NAP. He also introduced the topic of IKB data collection and the revision of the NAP.

152. **Serbia:** Miloš Radaković expressed uncertainty about the existence of such a mechanism. When the Facilitator asked if governmental institutions accepted data provided by NGOs, Mr. Radaković confirmed that they do, particularly in the context of criminal reports that undergo scrutiny. He noted that the Institute for Nature Conservation maintained a general database on IKB, which could be utilized for reports to the secretariats of CMS, Bern, or other conventions.
153. Slobodan Marković from the BPSSS pointed out that the official gazette of the Institute for Nature Conservation published a study on IKB that referenced some of the data published by BPSSS. However, he expressed skepticism about the incorporation of NGO data into the Ministry's official reports to international conventions. Mr. Marković emphasized that the IKB database maintained by the Institute for Nature Conservation was significantly different from that of BPSSS. Regarding the revision of the NAP, Mr. Radaković clarified that in Serbia, reviews of comparable action plans occurred every ten years, with no mid-term revisions planned. He further added that there were currently no formal evaluation plans in place in Serbia.
154. **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Nermina Sarajlić from the Ornithological Society Naše Ptice stated that there were currently no mechanisms in place for evaluating and monitoring the NAP. She emphasized that the data on IKB, collected solely by the Ornithological Society Naše Ptice and readily accepted by government institutions, were restricted to a few known hotspots. This extensive database, formatted as a large spreadsheet, was accessible upon request to all relevant stakeholders. It was also noted that the text of the NAP should include a comprehensive plan for its revision.
155. **Montenegro:** Mladen Ćabak from the Hunting Association of Montenegro addressed the challenges of monitoring and data collection in the country. He emphasized that without a robust monitoring program, decision-making would be hindered. While he acknowledged the potential of digital applications to consolidate data, he noted the absence of comprehensive national databases in Montenegro to adequately address the issue. Marija Šoškić from CZIP mentioned that the NGO maintained an IKB database. However, Ms. Sijarić pointed out that although the EPA, protected area management, the Museum of Natural History, CZIP, and the Hunting Association provided data to the Ministry when requested, the Ministry itself lacked a national database on IKB. Aleksandar Perović, an advisor at the EPA, emphasized that while his agency had a database, the information was limited due to inconsistent practices in data collection and submission. He stressed that for any effort to unify the data, it was essential that all stakeholders endorsed the database.
156. Regarding the revision of the NAP, Ms. Sijarić noted it would occur every five years, and evaluating the results would be part of this process.
157. The Facilitator highlighted the impressive structure of the Italian national database on wildlife poisoning, noting that data was regularly provided by cantonal authorities. He

stressed that effective systems could facilitate seamless data collection. He also cited Spain as an example of a country with a unified and comprehensive database on IKB. Uroš Pantović from VCF noted that this success was largely due to standardized reporting forms that facilitate data extrapolation. Mr. Perović observed that it was unlikely the databases of the Balkan Peninsula countries would be comparable to those of Spain or Italy, as both have specialized units and task forces dedicated to these issues. In response, the Facilitator asserted that the NAP should include initiatives aimed specifically at enhancing capacity-building. It was agreed that the NAP should incorporate a standardized monitoring and data collection plan for IKB, and that steering committees would need a unified plan to monitor the progress of NAP implementation.

## **11. Report to Plenary and Conclusions from Breakout Groups**

158. During the plenary session, two reporters from each breakout group presented their conclusions. Group 1 included participants from Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Group 2 comprised participants from Croatia, Albania, North Macedonia, and experts from Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Germany.

### **159. Question 1: The need for an IKB National Action Plan**

160. Group 1: Participants reached a consensus that developing the action plan was an objective in itself, as it would foster collaboration and coordination among various governmental institutions. Representatives from Montenegro stressed the importance of establishing an IKB NAP, underscoring the government's responsibility to adopt it and the need for consolidating data on IKB. A representative from Serbia agreed on the necessity of NAP on illegal killing of birds, pointing out the evident challenges involved. Furthermore, representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina indicated that the complexities of their administrative framework might require the formulation of two separate National Action Plans on IKB.

161. Group 2: The participants recognized the urgent problem of IKB. Initiatives to tackle IKB tend to be reactive and fragmented, relying heavily on the involvement of individuals and NGOs. A clearly articulated, collective vision was crucial. There was a significant need for strategic documents that: established a structured approach to combating IKB; facilitated timely and informed decision-making; provided a legal framework for law enforcement agencies; created a binding agreement among various institutions to ensure collaboration; identified obstacles to achieving goals; served as a fundraising tool; and enabled effective monitoring of progress.

### **162. Question 2: Legal basis for the adoption of the NAP**

163. Group 1: The representative from Montenegro confirmed that the development of the National Action Plan was officially part of the Government of Montenegro's agenda for 2024.

Representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina remarked that there was a well-established procedure for the adoption of action plans. Furthermore, a representative from Serbia pointed out that there was an official government resolution requiring the development of the NAP. It was pointed out that CMS Resolutions may serve as a legal basis for NAP.

164. Group 2: Representatives from North Macedonia emphasized the importance of international conventions, the upcoming Law on Nature Protection, and EU nature protection tools. In contrast, Croatian representatives mentioned the Rulebook on Strategic Planning and related directives. Meanwhile, Albanian representatives noted that the Council of Ministers had adopted a Roadmap along with an amended Plan concerning the Law on Nature Protection.

**165. Question 3: Requirements for formal procedure of NAP preparation?**

166. Group 1: The initial step in this process involved identifying stakeholders and authorities, followed by the establishment of a national working group. Key stakeholders included environmental law enforcement agencies, general law enforcement, hunting associations, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, representatives from the judiciary, wildlife rehabilitation centers, protected area management entities, and customs administration. It was seen as essential for the ministries of environmental protection to take the lead in developing the NAP, with support from NGOs. Given the historical lack of responsiveness from these ministries in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Interior could take on a leadership role, emphasizing that IKB was a criminal activity. The NAP had to undergo a public review process, in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the CMS Secretariat and the Bern Convention. Furthermore, budgeting for the NAP had to be prioritized and allocated among various institutions and NGOs based on specific activities. It was important to note that a lack of budgeting could suggest a "tick-boxing" or "checklist compliance" approach, indicating a superficial attempt to complete a task without truly fulfilling its objectives. In terms of adopting the plan, it was concluded that political will was vital and could be strengthened through effective communication and shaping public opinion.

167. **Group 2:** A Steering Committee was proposed to consolidate all institutions involved in the implementation of the NAP. This Committee had to include representatives from key policy-making bodies such as the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Ministry of Agriculture (covering hunting, veterinary, and phytosanitary sectors), Ministry of Health, Ministry of Tourism, and Ministry of Interior Affairs, along with law enforcement agencies, judiciaries, and auxiliary stakeholders like forensic laboratories, academic institutions, environmental NGOs, and hunting organizations. There was a recognized need to clearly delegate roles among stakeholders, including project leaders, facilitators and NAP authors, followed by a series of workshops and meetings. The structure of the NAP preparation necessitated a comprehensive situational analysis, centering on the assessment of the most impacted areas, while fostering collaborative efforts. The legal framework had to align with

international commitments, ensuring consistent enforcement of existing laws. The vision had to clearly define goals and objectives aimed at bird species protection. The action plan outlined specific actions - with targeted outputs and measurable outcomes, set within a prioritized timeline. It included financial strategies detailing funding sources, responsibilities and budget allocations for various initiatives. The plan would be subjected to regular evaluation and revision through frequent stakeholder meetings, ensuring alignment with strategic frameworks like the RSP and CMS-MIKT Scoreboard. The NAP could be formally adopted by either the Parliament, or the Council of Ministers, depending on the procedural requirements. Representatives from Croatia highlighted the presence of a National rulebook on strategic planning that outlined a Committee's structure, the designation of representatives, and their respective roles. The rulebook applied to the structure of any multi-stakeholder Committee. Croatia was also using an unofficial SMART method. Albania representatives responded that the format was flexible. Representatives from North Macedonia noted that while the format was currently unregulated, it was expected to be formalized under the upcoming Law on Nature Protection. The Italian representative clarified that ISPRA had been mandated to draft the document that would serve as the foundation for the following work, additionally acknowledging that international conventions and resolutions provided further authority for these efforts.

**168. Question 4: Implementation of the National Action Plan**

169. **Group 1:** It was concluded that the Ministry of Environmental Protection had to serve as the overarching institution responsible for implementation. The steering committee's role was important in making sure that the IKB NAP moved from theory to practical application, highlighting that without proper implementation, the value of the NAP would drop considerably. The implementation had to be overseen by a committee that would convene at least once per year or more often if necessary. Additionally, the value of an intergovernmental regional committee was acknowledged, as the issue of IKB extended beyond national borders. This Committee could comprise two representatives from each country: one from the government and the other from a non-governmental organization. Engagement and motivation of individual members of the working group was often crucial, as was personal contact with representatives of relevant institutions. Addressing the shortcomings of the judiciary system was essential, as it remained an issue across the region. The primary issue identified was that public prosecutors were often overwhelmed with cases unrelated to wildlife crime, hindering their ability to effectively address the IKB cases. Specialized and trained public prosecutors were critical for the successful investigation of wildlife crimes and establishing specialized police units focused on wildlife crime could serve as one of the most effective tools in combating these offenses. The Wildlife Crime Academy served as a strong source of motivation for public prosecutors. Data on implementation of the NAP could be collected through reporting forms and tools like the CMS Scoreboard. NGOs frequently played a crucial role in this process, although their data was sometimes disregarded by government institutions. The Committee needed to establish a standardized system for monitoring and data collection, which had to be



outlined in the NAP. The implementation committee was essential for the NAP's success by creating a detailed evaluation plan for regular assessments, which would be submitted to the Ministry of Environment or another relevant authority to ensure the NAP remained effective in meeting its goals. It was crucial to integrate wildlife poisoning incidents as part of the broader IKB NAP, given that wildlife poisoning was a significant IKB issue. Montenegro representatives emphasized that once the Ministry of Environmental Protection designated tasks related to the implementation of the NAP, there would be a strong adherence to these directives, driven by a sense of political accountability. Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia expressed concerns regarding the absence of mechanisms required to effectively implement the NAP on IKB. Serbia acknowledged that the likelihood of effective implementation was low, however, having a formal NAP could provide a strong foundation for individual cases.

170. **Group 2:** In Spain, the Ministry for the Ecological Transition served as the coordinating body for the anti-poisoning action plan, while Croatia was in the process of defining its coordinating entity, likely the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Green Transition (MEPGT). Italy's efforts were led by the Ministry of Environment and CUFAA, with an inter-institutional technical secretary formed by the Ministry and ISPRA acting as facilitators. To streamline these efforts, there was a need to develop Terms of Reference that would clearly outline the roles and tasks of the implementation group, as well as the establishment of a platform to enhance collaboration and information sharing. Creating a medium-term action plan (spanning five years) was essential for meaningful change, as shorter plans (e.g. spanning three years) would not yield visible results. The CMS Guidance recommended an IKB NAP span of five years, as extending beyond this timeframe could lead to decreased engagement from stakeholders. Regular meetings of the NAP Committee were required, during which reporting on progress had to commence. When conducting the situational analysis for capacity building, it was crucial to identify existing gaps and implement relevant actions. These had to include establishing a Wildlife Crime Academy, providing training for prosecutors and judges, enhancing forensics capabilities, and improving customs training related to wildlife trafficking and poisons.
171. **Question 5: Evaluation and monitoring of the results of a National Action Plan**
172. **Group 1:** Revisions typically occur every eight years and with mandatory verification by the Ministry of Environment or another relevant institution. An evaluation plan had to be devised by the Committee to regularly assess the action plan's progress. Serbia conveyed uncertainty about the existence of evaluation and monitoring plans. Concerns were expressed about the acceptance of data from NGOs and the accurate reporting of the factual situation to international bodies. Bosnia indicated that no mechanisms for evaluation were in place. It was emphasized that the geographical scope of the data on IKB, collected solely by the NGO and readily accepted by governmental institutions, was confined to a few identified IKB black spots. Montenegro indicated that the evaluation process would be addressed by the NAP, which was presently being developed.

173. **Group 2:** It was concluded that the midterm reports served as an effective opportunity for evaluation and improvement, while long-term action plans provided a better framework for thorough assessment. It was advisable that the evaluations were aligned with the timelines of international commitments, including midterm and final assessments of the Rome Strategic Plan or the Scoreboard. It was essential to ensure that the evaluators of the midterm and final reports were independent to maintain objectivity.

## 12. Discussion and next steps

### 12.1 Wildlife Crime Academy follow-up, new LIFE project

174. Mr. Jovan Andevski from VCF opened his presentation by once again strongly emphasizing the importance of people, their interpersonal connection, collaboration and personal engagement. He stressed that wildlife crime occurred all year round, at any time, even on holidays or quiet Sundays, and it required strong dedication and willpower to immediately drop everything and start an investigation. He stated that a clear indication of this kind of commitment was the 90% decrease in wildlife poisoning incidents in Andalusia. Mr. Andevski pointed out that the Wildlife Crime Academy (WCA) was a combination of the best practice experience and the effort to convey this knowledge to the future generations of investigators. The objective of the WCA was to raise capacities and awareness of the relevant stakeholders which included field officers, veterinary and forensic professionals, members of the judiciary system and other competent authorities. He stressed that most wildlife crime cases were dismissed due to a lack of proper investigation, implying that improved investigation of wildlife crime was paramount to the efficiency of prosecution. He highlighted that another important aspect of the WCA was fostering a network of professionals that would be able to train the following generations.
175. The concept of the Academy was its division into three levels: Level 1 covering the basics of wildlife crime investigation; Level 2 covering the advanced techniques of wildlife crime investigation; and Level 3 covering the process of analysis. Over the past few years, 66 individuals from 14 different countries had participated in the Wildlife Crime Academy. However, Mr. Andevski noted that if a country lacked a NAP and/or a committee, or at the very least an initiative for creating one, the extensive knowledge of the WCA was unlikely to be beneficial. Concerning the teaching approach, he emphasized that half of the process was theoretical, while the other half focused on practical applications, including the reenactment of real-life scenarios. At Level 2, he noted that the alumni concentrated on engaging with the suspects and witnesses, interpreting body language, collecting fingerprints, profiling, gathering DNA samples and subsequently participating in a practical, field exam. He mentioned that cell phones were not allowed during the Level 3 course due to the sensitivity of the shared information, which included the theoretical understanding of the criminal signature.

176. Mr. Andevski emphasized that upon graduating, the participants committed to organizing a minimum of two WCA courses in their respective countries. It was estimated that, as a result of the original 66 graduates, at least 350 additional people had received the training so far. The WCA was considered a big success and the plan for the future was to expand it geographically and foster similar training courses. He also briefly spoke of an upcoming project, regarding combating wildlife crime, that would cover project management, development of standard operating protocols and working groups, investigation process, roadmaps and strategies, training of the judicial organs, as well as the previously described activities of the WCA. The upcoming project would include actions in Montenegro, Slovenia, Georgia, Morocco, and other countries.
177. Upon conclusion of Mr. Andevski's presentation, Iván Ramírez added that it was essential for people to be trained and for different countries to participate in the process.

12.2 How to exchange on progress and stay in touch? Options for networking on IKB work and NAPs across the Balkans

178. Justine Vansynghe, Conservation of Migratory Birds Program Manager from EuroNatur, opened her presentation by pointing out the importance of staying in touch, following the conclusion of the workshops. In the efforts of brainstorming the best ways of keeping in touch, she reached out to the LinkedIn Artificial Intelligence program and the results were as follows: sending a summary; creating a support community; offering coaching and mentoring; providing microlearning opportunities; and tracking and celebrating progress. Ms. Vansynghe offered several ideas for various social platforms that could foster connections and engagement. The initial approach she discussed was mailing lists, which she considered too basic for a complex issue like wildlife crime. However, this could be enhanced by utilizing free email discussion groups like Google Groups and Gaggles Mail, though she expressed concerns regarding data privacy and a lack of direct messaging. More straightforward methods were direct messaging platforms like WhatsApp groups, Viber groups, Signal, etc., though data sharing and privacy were questionable as well. Slack was a professional platform that provided the best of both worlds, although its complexity could be a deterrent for some users. She also described Microsoft Teams as an intuitive platform, although it came with a subscription requirement. She emphasized that the most important thing to keep in mind was that the best platform was the one that was being actively used. In the follow-up of her presentation, she asked the participants to come forward with different methods of communication that they preferred. Since the responsibility for developing the NAP was with government officials, the question primarily focused on the governmental representatives, rather than the participants from the NGO sector.
179. Nada Mlinar pointed out that using the social network was quite common, but that there was also a specialized governmental application for this purpose. However, her conclusion was that for official matters, email was the main channel of communication.

180. Anela Sijarić pointed out email was the main channel of communication, as well as WhatsApp groups in some instances. She also emphasized that the Committee for large carnivores had a specialized platform.
181. Arianna Aradis noted that in Italy, mailing lists and Google Drive were used, in addition to an official WhatsApp group that was operational.
182. Miloš Radaković highlighted that mailing groups were in use, however, the official documents and final decisions required a specialized platform.
183. Iván Ramírez emphasized that governments typically hesitated to establish specialized platforms for communication and data exchange due to their complexity and that simpler platforms usually yielded better results.
184. Jovan Andevski mentioned that, based on his experience, WhatsApp was sufficient for quick communication. However, he emphasized that every platform needed a dedicated manager, and it was important for people to remain motivated. In conclusion, he emphasized that face-to-face meetings should not be overlooked, as they often resulted in productive outcomes.

### **13. CMS Updates on upcoming Joint Meeting and initiatives**

185. Claire (Foteini) Papazoglou, MIKT Coordinator, stated that though there were plans to hold the next MIKT meeting in October, unfortunately it was not feasible. Organisers were considering whether a meeting in November instead would be feasible, or alternatively in spring 2025. She presented the provisional agenda for the next MIKT meeting, that included: reports; technological advancements in IKB monitoring; presentation of an updated analysis of the 2023 Scoreboard results; updates on national perspectives; highlights of successful initiatives from the Wildlife Crime Academy; exploring funding opportunities for fighting IKB; how to conduct a mid-term assessment of the Rome Strategic Plan 2020-2030; presentation of the report from Podgorica NAP workshop; and setting the date for the next MIKT meeting. She concluded that the meeting was expected to take place no later than April 2025.

#### **13.1 CMS Initiative on unsustainable take: introduction and next steps**

186. Iván Ramírez began his presentation by highlighting the global initiatives approved at COP14. The newly established Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity brought together a coalition of organizations and international bodies, including the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Collaborative Living Landscapes Conservancy (CLLC), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-

WCMC), ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the Ramsar Convention. This initiative aimed at synergizing the expertise and resources of its partners to enhance ecological connectivity efforts at the national level. By fostering collaboration and supporting the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) goals and targets related to connectivity, the partnership sought to promote sustainable practices and biodiversity conservation across various ecosystems, but focused on the migratory species.

187. Mr. Ramírez presented some of the key points: The Scientific Council was urged to promote best practices in adaptive harvest management to tackle unsustainable species taking; The collaboration between the CMS Secretariat and the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management (CPW) was praised, with encouragement for continued efforts; Parties and the CMS Secretariat were urged to engage with UN organizations (UNTOC, UNODC, UNCAC) and CITES to combat illegal activities related to CMS-listed species; the Secretariat was instructed to establish a working group on taking of migratory species and enhance collaboration with relevant organizations to tackle the illegal and unsustainable taking of migratory species.
188. Mr. Ramírez concluded his presentation by stating that in the future, the organization will collaborate with partners, including CITES, Food and Agriculture Organization of UN, Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, UNDP, UNODC and relevant non-governmental organizations, to implement these key decisions. Additionally, it would continue to strengthen collaboration with key stakeholders, such as the World Trade Organization and World Customs Organization, to address the illegal trade of wildlife specimens and enhance monitoring of trade in CMS-listed species not currently included in CITES Appendices.

#### **14. Other Business**

189. The Chairman opened the floor for comments, remarks and other topics that did not make it officially into the workshop agenda.
190. Lilla Barabás from BirdLife Europe announced that the joint partnership of BirdLife and EuroNatur had been compiling information from the partners and experts on the situation and progress of IKB, in the geographical scope of CMS, MIKT and Bern Convention. The collected data would be analyzed during the autumn 2024, aiming to identify the gaps and offer good practice recommendations to the governments, as well as foster collaboration on mutual issues. The document would be published in 2025 and it would be aligned with the midterm point of the RSP. It would focus on various regions, including the Balkan Peninsula.
191. As there were no additional comments, the Chairman and CMS Secretariat closed the workshop by expressing their gratitude and thanks to the host country, to CMS Secretariat

and to all the participants and speakers. Finally, the EU was gratefully acknowledged for being a major funder of the meeting.

### **DAY 3 Wednesday, 4 September 2024**

#### **15. Field Trip to Skadar Lake National Park**

192. The third day of the workshop focused on a scheduled excursion to Skadar Lake National Park, a lake occasionally impacted by IKB. During the field trip, participants observed various uses of the river and lake, and saw many migratory species using the wetland and discussed about threats to the river and wetland. Among the species observed was a Dalmatian pelican, one of the key species breeding at Skadar Lake. The Dalmatian pelican is classified as Near Threatened (NT) on the IUCN Red List. Key threats to this species include habitat loss, disturbances, bycatch, as well as hunting and poaching.

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