



## **MINUTES FROM THE WETMAIN AREAS FINAL CONFERENCE WEBINAR**

The WetMainAreas Final Conference was held online on 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2020 via Zoom. 81 participants, representatives of policymakers, NGOs, wetland managers, academics, biodiversity and GIS experts as well as tourism organizations were registered. The participating countries were: Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia and Spain. Participants list is presented in **Annex\_1**.

For 1 hour before the meeting, participants were assisted by the facilitator and technical supporters to test if everything works fine in relation to the virtual meeting settings.

The event started at 10.00 o'clock (EEST).

The facilitator – Mrs. Desislava Dimova welcomed the participants and explained how the ZOOM application works, how the event is going to be conducted.

Asso. Prof. Petar Petrov, PhD (Project manager, University of Forestry, Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture, Bulgaria) welcomed the participants and gave the floor to Mrs. Stanimira Ivanova (Project coordinator, University of Forestry, Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture, Bulgaria) who presented in short the project context (**Annex\_2\_1**).

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) opened the **First Session: Presentations on WetMainAreas outputs** (all presentation are attached as **Annex\_2**), where:

- PhD Eleni Fitoka (Leader of Work Package 3, The Goulandris natural history museum, Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre, Greece) presented the Balkan-Mediterranean Wetlands mapping & connectivity (**Annex\_2\_2**);

- PhD Iphigenia Keramitsoglou (Institute for Astronomy, Astrophysics, Space Applications & Remote Sensing, National Observatory of Athens, Greece) presented the Monitoring of surface water dynamics in wetlands ecosystems using Sentinel-2 satellite (**Annex\_2\_3**)

- <https://extrema.space/WetMainAreas/dashboard.html>,  
<https://youtu.be/Zk01ZMAK1SA> ;



THE GOULANDRIS NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM  
GREEK BIOTOPE/WETLAND CENTRE



Agjencia Kombëtare  
e Mjedisit



HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
REGION OF THESSALY  
DEVELOPMENT PLANNING





- Mr. Nikola Kalaydzhiev (external IT developer, Bulgaria) presented The Balkan-Mediterranean wetlands Geoportal - <http://185.17.146.157>.

Mr. Jeroen Arends (Co-Lead ESP regional chapter South-East Europe, Serbia) commented that the Geoportal looks great and represented great functionality to be able to incorporate maps of the portal into QGIS.

PhD Nevena Ivanova (Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research, Bulgarian Academy of Science, Bulgaria) commented that the Geoportal is very useful.

Prof. Maya Stoyneva (Wetlands expert, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“) commented that the Geoportal is very useful and is an important achievement of the project.

Mrs. Dania Abdul Malak (Director of ETC-University of Malaga, Spain, Coordinator of the INTERREG Med Biodiversity Protection Community) commented that the Geoportal of WetMainAreas presented by Mr. Nikola Kalaydzhiev is very interesting and there is a potential to connect its results with the main capitalisation tool of the Mediterranean biodiversity Protection Community, the Mediterranean Biodiversity Knowledge Platform:

[https://panaceacatalogue.adabyron.uma.es/gvsigonline/core/load\\_public\\_project/panaceacommunity/](https://panaceacatalogue.adabyron.uma.es/gvsigonline/core/load_public_project/panaceacommunity/). She would like to check the potential of mirroring the results of WetMainAreas with the results of the MBPC specially that their portal will be maintained at least until mid-2022 and will be an opportunity to show the final results of WetMainAreas there at least for 2 more years.

Questions and answers followed.

Mrs. Lidia Alvanou (Thermaikos Gulf Protected Areas Management Authority, Greece) asked what type of wetlands are included in the project – if the sand marshes or coastal marine areas are included, is it according to the Ramsar definition or something else.

PhD Eleni Fitoka (Leader of Work Package 3, The Goulandris natural history museum, Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre, Greece) thanked for the question. She said that





all wetlands have been classified according to the Ramsar typology. The Ramsar convention consider wetlands including lakes, water bodies, coastal areas, marshes, inland, coastal – everything, all types according to the Ramsar typology. And this is also what Nikola showed – there is a classification, when you click on the map in the Geoportal and you see the specific type – for the big ones you see just the dominant type.

Mrs. Lidia Alvanou (Thermaikos Gulf Protected Areas Management Authority, Greece) thanked for the valuable information. She asked when we have all these wetlands in the project – artificial and natural - can we have different criteria for evaluation when we are dealing with man-made and natural, because all over the world artificial wetlands are increasing – 20 %. This means that some natural habitats converts into artificial. From scientific point of you – is this okay for us – we still have wetlands, but not natural anymore?

PhD Eleni Fitoka (Leader of Work Package 3, The Goulandris natural history museum, Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre, Greece) answered that this is a philosophical question. It depends on the priorities at the action plans on concervation, the local and regional conditions. Mrs. Fitoka said that she will say Yes to every piece of conservation, because there are many research work on the value of artificial wetlands for amphibians and other types of species.

Mr. Jeroen Arends (Co-Lead ESP regional chapter South-East Europe, Serbia) said that he is glancing through the portal and he was wondering if next to downloading layers and their meta data, if it is also possible to download the spectral bands of the tile(s) via the portal. Or that the coordinates can be substracted in order to download the spectral bands via the Corpernicus network.

PhD Iphigenia Keramitsoglou (Institute for Astronomy, Astrophysis, Space Applications & Remote Sensing, National Observatory of Athens, Greece) answered that it is not possible, because this is an amazing volume of data. What the user could do if he is interested at the rough data is to go on the one of the portals from the data on the image and download the relevant ties. At National Observatory of Athens are not able to





accommodate all the rough data. National Observatory of Athens keeps only the necessary extracted indexes..

Mr. Jeroen Arends (Co-Lead ESP regional chapter South-East Europe, Serbia) thanked for the answer and agreed that would be a lot of information. And he would not expect the National Observatory of Athens to host that either. Being able to download via Copernicus would be the appropriate way and any information regarding the tile for that purpose would be helpful which he expected can be obtained via the portal.

After a short break the First Session proceeded with presentations of:

- Mrs. Stanimira Ivanova (Leader of Work Package 4, University of Forestry, Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture, Bulgaria), who presented Pilot demonstration on wetlands connectivity assessment (**Annex\_2\_4**);
- Assoc. Prof. Ilinka Terziyska, PhD (Faculty of Economics, South-West University Neofit Rilski, Bulgaria) who presented Pilot demonstration on cultural/heritage assessment (**Annex\_2\_5**); and
- Mrs. Oriana Hanhxari (Leader of Work Package 5, National Environmental Agency, Albania), who presented Support in policy (**Annex\_2\_6**).

Questions and answers followed.

Mr. Jeroen Arends (Co-Lead ESP regional chapter South-East Europe, Serbia) commented that the presentation of Mrs. Oriana Hanhxari (Leader of Work Package 5, National Environmental Agency, Albania) represents very interesting comparative analysis. It shows that there are discrepancies between the countries various policy, legislative and institutional frameworks. He asked if Mrs. Hanhxari could say something about if and how that hinders regional and cross border cooperation on wetland management and what could be the way to overcome them?

Mrs. Oriana Hanhxari (Leader of Work Package 5, National Environmental Agency, Albania) said that this is a very good question and answered that this was also the purpose of the analysis that have been done. We can go a further step based on what we have identified by getting use of the results that we have on the current situation on the





wetlands and to try to adapt this at country level and to translate it to policies by taking from the good practices of the other countries, which are one step forward and to have more adaptive approach on that regard. But this would need the support of policy makers. We have the right expertise, we have the right outputs and that has to be reflected based on very good analyses.

Mr. Jeroen Arends (Co-Lead ESP regional chapter South-East Europe, Serbia) asked if the various EU framework directives would be the way forward. Various countries in the region are candidate member states so eventually they will need to adopt their legislation. According to him that is the way forward.

After a short break, Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) opened the **Second Session: Round Table on Future Application of the Outputs.**

The first topic for discussion was:

**What could be the practical use of the WetMainAreas results for improving wetland conservation?**

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mr. Charalampos Ververis (Greek Ministry of Environment and Energy, Protected Areas Department).

According to him the first thing that we have to keep in mind always in this kind of projects is that they are funded mainly by public funds. This means that the results have to be used and applied in the real life. The importance of the WetMainAreas project and its results is that it is about wetlands. And when we speak about wetlands, we all know that they are very important ecosystems, very crucial. When we talk about wetlands we touch almost every aspect of environment. During the event it was talked about biodiversity and conservation, because wetlands are very crucial ecosystems. They are very rich ecosystems in terms of biodiversity. So, when we talk about wetlands, we talk about ecosystems. The big challenge that we have in front of us is the climate change. And this is where wetlands are going to play a crucial role, because they are not only ecosystems that host biodiversity, but their importance to water recourse management is also critical. They are also important for the economy, for ecotourism, for recreation,





for agriculture. So, if we want to use the results of this project, we have to seriously think how we can apply these results in almost every aspect of environment and management. We have to report, we have to go by our legal obligations. Some countries from the project (Greece and Bulgaria) are already EU members. So, they have to go by the relevant directives about biodiversity and water management. The other countries are not members, yet. They have to get into the group soon or later. They have to prepare themselves, so their entrance into EU will be smoother in the way of their legal system adaptation.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mrs. Yulia Grigorova (Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water, NATURA 2000 and Protected areas Department):

Mrs. Yulia Grigorova (Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water, NATURA 2000 and Protected areas Department) said that it is her pleasure to be familiar with WetMainAreas and the achievements of this project. For the Ministry of environment and water it is really important to have big package of data for wetlands within the territory of Republic of Bulgaria. This will be used for reporting to the Ramsar Convention – the achievements in Bulgaria and the state of the wetlands. Now is the period for development of Prioritized Action Framework (PAF) for NATURA 2000. Many of wetlands in Bulgaria are part of the NATURA 2000 network and they are recognized as really important areas for Habitats Directive and Birds Directive. From one side the results will have added value to PAF. From another side - there is a new green architecture for common agriculture policy. It is really important that mandatory standards from agricultural producers and farmers will be the maintenance of wetlands territories in their areas. The data and the results from WetMainAreas also could be used by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry in Bulgaria.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mr. Rigas Tsiakiris (Forestry Service of Ioannina, Greece).



According to him it is nice to see all of these very nice maps, that have been produced and are available to the public. Two steps forward would be to make some seminars and disseminate these results to the public authorities in order to conserve these ecosystems, especially those that are not legally protected. Also to stress the priorities for conservation management. The second thing is that the open GIS tools could be also open to the public in order to involve them in future projects, to send and share the data, which is ground of the whole thing. If we want to conserve the wetland ecosystems, we have to involve the public. Also to monitor the wetlands.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to PhD Nevena Ivanova (Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research, Bulgarian Academy of Science, Bulgaria).

PhD Nevena Ivanova said that the data from the project and from the Geoportal could be used also from the Regional Inspectorates of Environment and Water in Bulgaria and also from the Ministry of Environment and Water at the process of conducting Strategic Environmental Assessments and Compatibility Assessments of different national and local projects that fall within NATURA 2000 areas. This geoportal that was presented is very useful, there is a lot of data, which could be used in these analyses.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mrs. Oriana Hanhxari (Leader of Work Package 5, National Environmental Agency, Albania).

Mrs. Oriana Hanhxari (Leader of Work Package 5, National Environmental Agency, Albania) brought to the attention of the participants that the national inventory performed by the project is the first one after almost more than 14-15 years ago, when was conducted such at national (for Albania) level. PhD Eleni Fitoka know this very well, because she has been one of the key experts in the first and last till now wetlands inventory at national level. This means that now there is an up to date inventory, analyses on connectivity, which is really important, there is analyses on biodiversity ecosystems, also aspects analyses on cultural and natural attractions that are very good components for developing of economic and social activities. So there is a very complex study, based





on data, based on a very scientific and methodological approach in line with all the manuals, guidelines and indications, coming from international and country level policy framework. So, we have very complex and completed study. What could be done at national level with this study? First of all, the National Environmental Agency is a project partner, directly involved in the project and can get better and efficient use of this data. The Agency is in charge with the main important products on the state of environmental report. This data could be used for assessment of the state of wetlands at country level – what is the situation, what are the threats, what are the recourses. Mrs. Hanxhari could propose the data from the project to be used for the annual environmental reporting in Albania, which is based on monitoring. In terms of communications and visualization of the products from the project, this is the first small step that could be done. Then through this document important messages could be extracted, to give indications to the Ministry, to the policymakers, clear messages about which are the needs, what have to be done, by giving clear indications and clear advises. Till the moment in Albania there were different projects, but the results are very fragmented, not integrated in more broader assessments and studies. Now we have in our hands all about wetlands and we can have a better use of them. Mrs. Hanxhari gave the word to Mrs. Elvana Ramaj (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Albania) if she would like to add something.

Mrs. Elvana Ramaj (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Albania) congratulated the project partners for completion of the project. She found all the project results very useful and connected with their needs.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mr. Darko Blinkov (State Environmental Inspectorate, North Macedonia). He had some technical problem with his laptop and connected through his cell phone, just with video, without audio. That is why he commented via the chat option. He wrote that he found the project very useful. He congratulated all partners for the really good job and visible results - very important networking, Data for Wetlands and using of new modern technology tools. For North Macedonia it will be very useful to use project data to improve planning of the State





Environmental Inspectorate on Nature Protection Inspectors and will be good synergy between different sectors for joint collaboration. Mr. Blinkov said that our communication will continue in near future, for better environment for all of us.

The second topic for discussion from the round table was:

**How to promote Balkan-Mediterranean cultural values for sustainable tourism?**

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mrs. Lily Mordechai, (Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos (MedINA)).

Mrs. Lily Mordechai, (Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos (MedINA)) congratulated the WetMainAreas team. She strongly believes that the project results could support the effective conservation of the transboundary wetlands. She hopes that they would be used as widely as possible. She is also happy to see that the cultural values of wetlands are part of the project. In the Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos they have been worked with the Mediterranean cultural values for over 16 years. With regards to how to promote Balkan-Mediterranean cultural values for sustainable tourism she mentioned that there were a lot of projects that have been worked on sustainable tourism in the transboundary area. Also there are number of small businesses, tourist operators that have been taken eco-tourism activities in these areas. Her proposal for better promotion of the cultural values, identified by the project, is to identify and engage the stakeholders in all the countries and work for synergies as much as possible, rather than to keep the results within the project. The most important thing is to find synergies and disseminate them as wide as possible. Her proposal is to expand the stakeholders group and include all small tourist operators, hotels, guides, etc.. Additionally making information materials could be useful. And of course – making the guidebook as available as possible. They are looking forward for receiving the Guidebook on wetlands cultural values.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mr. Vasilis Mitsios (External expert of Region of Thessaly).





Mr. Vasilis Mitsios (External expert of Region of Thessaly) thanked for the almost 3 years of close collaboration with the WetMainAreas partners. It is pleasure and honour for him to be participated in this project, even as an external expert. He said that it is needed to find the real connection among the wetlands preservation and the collaboration with the public sector, locally administrations and private contribution. We need the hotels, the accommodation providers, the tourism providers to create tourism package around this environmental product. We have many things to show. It is needed to go beyond the sea and sun tourism and create new types of tourism. The creation of tourism packages around these areas, these small environmental heritage places is an unique opportunity for everyone to create a new tourism product, to increase the tourism capacity. Perhaps this could be a job generator for this area.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) asked Mrs. Simana Markovska (Municipality of Gotse Delchev) to share her thoughts.

Mrs. Simana Markovska (Municipality of Gotse Delchev) thanked to the Lead partner (University of Forestry, Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture) for leading the partners through this project as well as to the other partners for doing their respective roles and contributing for achieving the project results, that have been presented during the Conference. Mrs. Markovska brought a little bit more global aspect to the discussion in the view of the present situation with the global pandemic. Looking in the future we can see some opportunities in the post pandemic situation regarding the tourism, sustainable development and environmental protection. Mrs. Markovska has been part in the recent months in number of discussions, incl. international ones, on this topic and all trends are pointing in one direction – in the post COVID19 world, the types of tourism that will matter will be first the slow tourism, slow travelling, which means that people will not rush to visit places, but will focus on certain areas where initiatives like this one, like the WetMainAreas project approaches can come in. The cross-border/transnational projects will have a good place in such a tourism market environment. Then, there is a local travel prevailing. People will focus on the closest environment. And



here again the cross-border connectivity will be very much important. According to Mrs. Markovska, projects like this one will become more and more valuable and the results that we have here can be taken further on to bring more benefits.

Mr. Jeroen Arends (Co-Lead ESP regional chapter South-East Europe, Serbia) commented that important topic that relates to what Mrs. Simana Markovska, of the Municipality of Gotse Delchev said regarding slow tourism post Covid-19 is awareness raising. Events such as Covid-19 or an environmental disaster raises attention and awareness in people how important our natural areas are.

The third topic for discussion from the round table was:

**How the Balkan-Mediterranean collaboration on wetlands conservation could continue?**

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mr. Jeroen Arends (Co-Lead ESP regional chapter South-East Europe, Serbia).

Mr. Jeroen Arends (Co-Lead ESP regional chapter South-East Europe, Serbia) represented himself as a member of the Ecosystem Services Partnership. It is a worldwide network of researchers, universities, conservation organizations, policymakers. They have a network in the South-East Europe - es-partnership.org , <https://www.researchgate.net/project/Ecosystem-Services-via-the-Ecosystem-Services-Partnership-ESP-Regional-Chapter-South-East-Europe> . He said that wetlands provide very important ecosystem services, in terms of water regulation, water storage, climate regulation, carbon storage, also protection against flooding. Wetlands over the Balkan-Mediterranean are under different threats. He congratulated the project team for the very successful project and the very impressive Geoportal. Wetlands are important and this kind of technology – the Remote sensing data matches very visible what is the condition of the wetland, how it is extended, or how it is changed. It is important the project team to continue working in a network, to apply for further EU finance – INTERREG, but also HORIZON 2020 in another form. Also the EU has adopted a new EU Biodiversity Strategy, which also opens rules for collaboration. Also not to forget the EU





Green Deal. According to him this kind of projects are many useful also for the Mid-East countries – Africa, for instance. Also very important is the public-private partnership. The most obvious example could be the ecotourism.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mrs. Dania Abdul Malak (Director of ETC-University of Malaga, Spain, Coordinator of the INTERREG Med Biodiversity Protection Community).

Mrs. Dania Abdul Malak (Director of ETC-University of Malaga, Spain, Coordinator of the INTERREG Med Biodiversity Protection Community) had been working together with PhD Eleni Fitoka (Leader of Work Package 3, The Goulandris natural history museum, Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre, Greece) some years ago in HORIZON 2020 SWOS project. She has been coordinating several initiatives like the Mediterranean Biodiversity Protection Community (MBPC), funded under INTERREG-Mediterranean Programme, where there are numerous umbrella projects. These projects are mainly done to mainstream the use of tools into multi-level practises & decision-making processes. She coordinates focusing on biodiversity protection. There are 15 projects – some of them are still ongoing, some of them are ended. The initiative has got a first phase that started in 2016 and ended by the end of 2019. Now is the second phase, that is ongoing until June, 2022. Mrs. Dania Abdul Malak works very close to the MAES working group.

Mrs. Dania Abdul Malak (Director of ETC-University of Malaga, Spain, Coordinator of the INTERREG Med Biodiversity Protection Community) presented the possible collaboration of the Mediterranean Biodiversity Protection Community with WetMainAreas project (**Annex\_2\_7**).

Within the Mediterranean Biodiversity Protection Community there are working groups. During the last week PhD Eleni Fitoka (Leader of Work Package 3, The Goulandris natural history museum, Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre, Greece) was invited for kicking off the process of working group 3 focusing mainly on lands and wetlands ecosystems. Synergies are opened to take place. For the WetMainAreas they already had a first





discussion with PhD Eleni Fitoka that was followed up by exchange between the two programmes coordinators – from the Interreg Balkan-Mediterranean and Interreg Mediterranean. The thematic priority of wetlands is really key to consolidate and work in a coherent way in the upcoming in these 2 years, when the Mediterranean Biodiversity Protection Community will still be ongoing. There was an agreement that this is of interest by the 2 programmes. Different inputs that can be seen is the MBPC deliverables. The WetMainAreas results clearly taking place in creation of Mediterranean wide knowledge base on the extend and the condition of wetlands ecosystems in the Mediterranean (wetlands ecosystems as defined by Ramsar). They would like to include the missing parts, including the Balkan region. They are also working on an event – the development of the EU Green Week. They are applying by the end of July for Workshop that focusing on highlighting the wetlands and role of the EU policy for developing a frame for that. Another very interesting part is the Geoportal. The geoportal is very nice, very well developed. From MBPC side also there is a geoportal, where they are putting all the knowledge that is coming from many institutions. Another suggestion from Mrs. Dania Abdul Malak is if there is an interest from the project partners to mainstream as well the results of this geoportal into those to MBPC – moving all the database to their portal or at least mirroring.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Prof. Maya Stoyneva (Wetlands Expert, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“, Bulgaria).

Prof. Maya Stoyneva (Wetlands Expert, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“, Bulgaria) thanked to the organizers who invited her to participate in this project. It was really very nice work and it is quite difficult to speak after two colleagues who almost covered all topics about our future collaboration. She completely agrees with them. She thinks that during these 3 years we proved that we are a very good team. The team has all the power to continue and to achieve good results in the future. Prof. Maya Stoyneva would support all future collaborations as well as expanding this collaboration as much as possible. Prof. Maya Stoyneva said some words more about the topics of future





collaboration as scientist – she is the author of the first Inventory of the Bulgarian wetlands and she is more dedicated with the scientific topics of the study. Prof. Maya Stoyneva shared that in our future collaboration we have to step on our good achievements, the tools that have been implemented in this project – the work on connectivity, the way of very well interrogation of remote-sensing and work on shore on biodiversity and data from land. This is something very important that should continue in further projects. Perhaps we can enlarge a little bit topics going more in following wetlands in terms of global climatic changes, their changes in situation of such global warming, expanding to new areas. According to Prof. Maya Stoyneva in some way one part is missing in this project, which is not in any case negative – there is one topic of big problem of wetlands, which is exactly related with human activities and with global changes and this is the problem of water blooms and toxins, which are very risky for human health. From this point of view the remote sensing data would be very important and we can expand a little bit the scope of our future work to try to fix the wetlands in which such problem exist and how they are also related with the nature conservation and biodiversity.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mrs. Maria Pangiotopoulou (Ornitologist, Rediviva ecotrips).

Mrs. Maria Pangiotopoulou (Ornitologist, OIKOTOPIA) said that she is glad that she was invited to this event. She has been working very long time on conservation, especially big wetlands, Ramsar wetlands in the North-East Greece. In this sense it was very difficult for them to understand the extreme value of some very small wetlands, some very little islands of water that are scattered in areas that are not protected. After working all these years with the ornithological society or Aristotele University, Mrs. Maria Pangiotopoulou decided to work more seriously on ecotourism. In this face she is here today – Rediviva ecotrips – a small farm. This is very important tool to people to understand, to live this that otherwise they will read in a booklet or in a pamphlet – to have an experience for it.



Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mrs. Petra Pop Ristova (Scientist, North Macedonia).

Mrs. Petra Pop Ristova (Scientist, North Macedonia) said that according to her the logical consequence of this project is the background of knowledge of wetlands to go into dealing with the management of the wetlands. Now we have the background information and how to really protect them. In terms of that Mrs. Petra Pop Ristova (Scientist, North Macedonia) believes that the partnership can continue gathering information on wetlands. They will be changing. That is why it is very important to keep updating this knowledge that we have through the existing technologies, through the tools, developed in this project. She suggested the database to be linked with other databases such as for biodiversity. Mrs. Petra Pop Ristova (Scientist, North Macedonia) would like to see ministries and agencies, especially the ones, involved in policy making to be trained to use the geoportal, that was developed within the project in order they to really make good knowledge and information and good policies.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Mrs. Christina-Maria Bateka (Project Officer, Balkan-Mediterranean Joint Secretariat).

Mrs. Christina-Maria Bateka (Project Officer, Balkan-Mediterranean Joint Secretariat) thanked for the invitation. She said that she is really glad hearing that the materia developed in the context of the WetMainAreas project is really useful. This is the main objective of the funding programme. She mentioned 3 points of view on How the BalkanMed collaboration on wetlands conservation could continue:

1. Organizing of events in order to disseminate the importance of wetlands conservation. This could be institutional, European events, just like Mrs. Dania Abdul Malak said – the Green Week, that we are currently organizing in collaboration between the WetMainAreas project and INTERREG MED project. The BalkanMed Programme and the Joint Secretariat can support this kind of events, even after the end of the project and we can all together disseminate this part of the environmental issue. In the future, after



the end of the project, we can discuss it and to organize such events and to disseminate the importance and the results of the project.

2. The next programming period – Mrs. Bateka said that the JS is waiting for the WetMainAreas project in the next programming period to submit new proposal. Of course the partnership has to show that it is still working on the results and the objectives of the project, but there is an activity, there is a sustainability.

3. New issue is that tourism will be additional axes priority in the next programming period. This part of the WetMainAreas project could be developed alone, as well.

Mrs. Desislava Dimova (Facilitator) gave the floor to Assoc. Prof. Petar Petrov, PhD (Project manager, University of Forestry, Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture, Bulgaria) who made the final conclusion of the WetMainAreas Final Conference.

Assos. Prof. Petar Petrov, PhD, concluded the WetMainAreas Final Conference with a few thoughts on what the Partnership achieved during the last 3 years of project implementation:

- created strong partnership, trust and found friends within Greece, Bulgaria, Albania and North Macedonia, despite the national borders.
- laid the foundations for fruitful cooperation not only within the Balkan-Mediterranean territory, but even beyond it.
- jointly mapped the wetlands all over the Balkan-Mediterranean territory and created the Balkan-Mediterranean Wetlands Geoportal which provides access to the national inventory geodatabases.
- jointly provided Satellite based monitoring service of monitoring the surface water dynamics.
- the partners all together proved the significance of wetlands as connecting units among NATURA 2000 and Emerald sites.
- bridged together wetland's cultural and natural heritage.



- jointly encouraged the policy makers and representatives of authorities responsible for land use planning, conservation and protection of natural resources to use the knowledge generated by the Balkan Mediterranean Wetland Inventory and Assessment.

Before to say Goodbye, he again thanked to all of the participating partners and experts who drew up the courage to complete this challenge, called Improving the conservation effectiveness of wetlands. In conclusion Mr. Petrov said that the partnership seek to new horizons for further development of what we achieved by now.