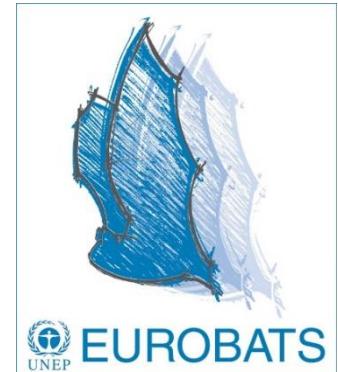


18th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Videoconference, 16 September 2021

Record



1. Attendance

This is listed as Annex 1 to the Record.

2. Opening remarks

Ms. Barbara Geschier greeted the participants as the Chair of the Standing Committee. She was pleased to meet the members of the Committee, this being her first EUROBATS meeting after she had taken over as EUROBATS Administrative Focal Point for Belgium from Mr. Jeroen Panis. Ms. Geschier explained that she agreed to chair the Standing Committee (StC) for the following year when the Standing Committee Chair and the Vice-Chair would need to be elected again. Being new to the Committee and EUROBATS, she stated that she would be listening a lot, and that she was in close contact with her colleague, Mr. Ludo Holsbeek, who was a bat expert and a member of the Advisory Committee to EUROBATS (AC) representing Belgium and Flanders. Since there were quite a few new members of the Standing Committee, EUROBATS Executive Secretary, Mr. Andreas Streit, asked the participants to take turns introducing themselves.

3. Adoption of the Agenda

Ms. Geschier enquired whether there were any remarks to the Agenda. Mr. Charles-Henri de Barsac asked if it would be possible to indicate which documents were examined under which agenda point. Mr. Streit confirmed that in future these references would be included in the Agenda. There being no further comments, the Agenda was adopted.

Action point 1: The Secretariat to include document numbers in the Agendas for future meetings.

4. Adoption of the Rules of Procedure

Commenting on the Rules of Procedure, Mr. Oliver Schall proposed to add a phrase under Rule 14 stating that, in a biannual rhythm, StC meetings should take place virtually. This clause would ensure that not each meeting had to take place face-to-

face. It had already been agreed that StC meetings could also be conducted on the phone, but with new technologies at disposal, this should be even easier. Mr. de Barsac asked whether it was necessary for the Rules of Procedure to be adopted at every meeting. He proposed that the Rules of Procedure, once adopted, remain valid for all the future meetings, except if these needed to be amended. Mr. Streit agreed to both proposals. Except for the year of the Meeting of the Parties (MoP), when a joint face-to-face meeting of the Standing Committee and the Advisory Committee (StC/AC) was necessary, a general rule that every second meeting of the Standing Committee should be a videoconference would be incorporated into the Rules of Procedure. These would then be presented at the following StC meeting without a need to adopt them, unless there were other changes which required adoption.

Action point 2: The Secretariat to add a phrase under the Rules of Procedure stating that every second StC meeting should be a videoconference (except for the joint StC/AC meetings). The Rules of Procedure should not be adopted at each meeting, but only in case they were amended.

5. Report of the Chair of the Advisory Committee

Mr. Streit referred the participants to Doc.EUROBATS.StC18.11, the written report of the Chair of the Advisory Committee, Professor Danilo Russo from Italy. He informed the StC delegates that the 25th Advisory Committee Meeting (AC25) took place as a videoconference on the 30th of April 2021. Since the meeting was conducted virtually, it was the best attended AC meeting ever. At the same time, it was a very dense and productive meeting as well – the Secretariat had urged the Intersessional Working Groups of the Advisory Committee (IWGs) to meet in the weeks before AC25 to have their own deliberations to be able to progress their work and report back during the AC meeting. Eight of the IWGs had met beforehand, which considerably improved and increased the output of the AC meeting. The Executive Secretary, however, emphasised that videoconferences could not replace intense face-to-face IWG meetings over several days. He remained optimistic that the joint StC/AC meeting in Sarajevo, scheduled for 2022, could take place in person. Mr. Streit also hoped that the Secretariat would be able to publish the precise dates of the joint meeting as soon as possible, after the consultation with the host government and the venue hotel. With Easter falling quite late in the following year, the Secretariat was hoping to schedule the meeting before the Easter

break. Nevertheless, the international calendar also needed to be consulted. It was planned that the meeting took place over four days, as it had been the case in the past.

6. Secretariat report

Mr. Streit drew the participant's attention to Doc.EUROBATS.StC18.8 and only summarised the key points. Regarding the *Secretariat staff*, the Executive Secretary informed the delegates that Ms. Kate Horn left the Secretariat as of the 1st of April 2020 to take up another post outside of the UN System. The Secretariat had reorganised its tasks and this post would be left vacant to allow increasing the post occupancy of the Scientific Officer, Dr. Suren Gazaryan, to 80 percent. This increase was foreseen in the budget but without the necessary funds. The change in the staffing situation of the Secretariat made the increase of the P2 post occupancy possible. This new arrangement and the redistribution of the tasks were overall going well. If the Agreement grew significantly, the post of the Secretary might be occupied again, but currently there was no need for it.

Considering the *Agreement membership*, Mr. Streit informed the delegates that, effective from the 21st of August 2021, Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the Agreement. The process of accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina took a bit longer because the Depository had not accepted the instrument of accession due to a mistake in its wording. With a revised instrument of accession being deposited, Bosnia and Herzegovina became the 38th Party to EUROBATS. Spain also informed about its new accession efforts. Several times in the past, Spain was close to joining EUROBATS and each time these efforts were interrupted, either due to a change in government or an economic crisis. Mr. Streit expressed his hope that Spain would complete the process of accession before the next Meeting of the Parties.

With regard to *outreach*, Mr. Streit stated that, owing to the voluntary contributions the Secretariat received regularly – especially the voluntary contribution from the German Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety – a lot of material for outreach purposes to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the International Bat Night (IBN) and the 30th anniversary of the Agreement had been produced. Most of this material EUROBATS Focal Points had already seen – they were informed about it by e-mail or the material was sent to them by mail. The shipment of the material to all those who demanded it kept the Secretariat quite busy. Additionally, various volumes of the EUROBATS Publication Series and leaflets continued to be in high demand.

Speaking about the *EPI projects* the Secretariat could support in 2019 and 2020 thanks to the voluntary contributions from Germany and Luxembourg, Mr. Streit referred the participants' attention to the Secretariat report as well as the written summary of the outcomes of EPI projects available as Inf.EUROBATS.StC18.2 on the EUROBATS website.

Mr. Streit proceeded to inform the delegates of an unexpected increase of the corporate initiative costs (Umoja costs) for the CMS family secretariats. He explained that several years ago the United Nations decided to introduce an Enterprise Resource Planning software called UMOJA. The delegates might rather know it as SAP, which was widely internationally used, especially in the private sector. All administrative processes in the United Nations were managed through this software system. It was a complex system that required regular maintenance and further development. EUROBATS had no influence on the decision to apply UMOJA – it was applied to the entire United Nations, which was a decision made by the UN General Assembly. The UN had a significant starting capital to employ the system, but these funds had been used up. On the other hand, already in the past EUROBATS had been charged for this system, though it was not aware of it. These costs were covered by the Programme Support Costs (PSC): 13 percent on any expenditure were PSC which went to UNEP for the work they were doing in administering conventions and agreements. For CMS, its Administrative and Finance Management Unit with five staff members was financed from PSC.

In 2021, however, UN Headquarters adopted a new methodology of apportioning UMOJA costs: From a programme support revenue basis to a head-count basis. With this new way of calculating costs, EUROBATS would be paying as much for UMOJA as some other organisation with a much higher budget, and the costs would amount to ca. 2, 000 USD per person per year. Neither the Secretariat, nor UNEP were satisfied with this change, and UNEP provided an official complaint to UN Headquarters. At this stage, the Secretariat only wanted to inform the delegates about the rise in the UMOJA costs and was not in the position to suggest any solution. Should it be decided that the agreements would be charged for the UMOJA costs on a new basis already for this year, the Secretariat could cover those costs from the savings made due to the pandemic. However, for the following years, it would be necessary to discuss if adjustments in the budget were needed.

Commenting on the staffing situation of the Secretariat, Mr. Schall expressed his satisfaction that the post occupancy of the Scientific Officer could be increased after several years of looking for a solution to this situation. He also expressed his hopes

that Spain would eventually join the Agreement, which could further stabilise the financial situation of EUROBATS. Mr. Schall asked whether there were any other state interested in joining the Agreement. The Executive Secretary explained that he was not aware of any other country that was in an advanced stage of accession. Referring to the UMOJA costs, Mr. Schall mentioned that it was good this topic would also be discussed during the coming Standing Committee Meeting to CMS. Germany was considering asking its representative in Nairobi to become active on this point, however, it seemed that the problem was rather in New York than in Nairobi. In Mr. Schall's opinion, it would be good if the Agreement were exempted of these additional costs at least for the current and the following years, since the budgets for these two years had already been agreed upon. In conclusion, Mr. Streit emphasised that, in case the Parties were not satisfied with this new cost distribution mechanism, the only way to change and influence the future mechanism of cost sharing was through the representative in the UN General Assembly.

7. Administrative matters:

- a) *Report on income and expenditure in the financial year 2020 as well as Trust Fund status as of 31 December 2020*

Mr. Streit was glad to report that, as in the previous years, the contributions were received in a very reliable manner. There were only very few arrears, which usually got paid with some delay. The Secretariat was positive that this contribution would be paid in due course. Mr Streit would take the opportunity at the following MoP, when most of the Parties were represented, to thank them for their reliable payment of contributions. Annex 1 to Doc.EUROBATS.StC18.4. gave an overview of the status of contributions received. EUROBATS also had a quite unique situation that two countries paid their contributions at the end of the year for the following year (France and the Czech Republic).

More relevant part was Annex 2 of the same document, showing the expenditure for 2020. Mr. Streit was glad to inform the delegates that the expenditure situation was also very good, and that significant savings could be made in 2020. For the new members of the Standing Committee, he explained that, starting from 2019, the Agreement had a difficult financial situation, which was caused by a continuous decline of the value of the Euro, negatively affecting the trust fund reserve and some expenditures. One example of these expenditures were the professional staff costs. The negative balance on the P4 budget line did not result from erroneous calculations but only from the unfavourable relation between the Euro and the US dollar. This consisted in the fact that staff costs for professional staff members were

computed in USD, the staff costs including salary, medical and pension contributions, etc. At times when the Euro was weak, which had been the case in the past years, for the same amount of staff costs in Euro, bigger amounts of US dollar were needed. Luckily, this gap could have been compensated by other lines for staff costs, so that there was no over-expenditure in the overall staff component of the budget. An over-expenditure also happened in the P2 budget line, however, it was not visible in Annex 2 as funds had been shifted from the Secretary's budget line (G4) to the P2 budget line. Therefore, despite the higher post occupancy of the P2 post, this budget line was not showing any deficit. Currently, there was no reason to be worried, but when preparing the budget for the following quadrennium, exchange rate developments and fluctuations would have to be considered and the budget lines adjusted to the expenditure. All the other budget lines had savings, also because Germany generously agreed to cover regular costs, such as IT costs, to relieve the regular budget. Mr. Streit also mentioned that, in 2019, an appeal was made to all the Parties for additional voluntary contributions to help the Agreement overcome the difficult financial situation. Additionally, there was an austerity plan put in place by the Secretariat. However, the significant surplus in 2020 was mainly caused by the pandemic and the fact that no meetings could take place and no travel was organised, which traditionally represented the biggest portion of the expenses. Due to the savings made during the pandemic, the Secretariat would be in the position to organise the meetings in the following years without any problems. Ms. Geschier commented that the costs for the meetings could be kept lower with more virtual meetings being organised. Mr. Streit explained that Mr. Schall's proposal referred only to the meetings of the Standing Committee, and that these meetings did not cause bigger costs, since there was only one delegate that was entitled to receive support for attending StC meetings. As for the AC meetings, it would be difficult to shift them to virtual meetings – the work that the Advisory Committee was so vast and complex, and the delegates needed their meetings and the possibility to sit together to allow for progress. Therefore, on that part there was no big margin for savings. Mr. Schall supported Mr. Streit and confirmed that it was very important for the AC meetings to be organised in person and to have different IWGs at one place. Ms. Marie Nedinge also supported the previous statements and confirmed the importance of face-to-face AC meetings for the work of Focal Points in their own countries.

Speaking about the Trust Fund Status Reports, the Executive Secretary explained that the Trust Fund Status Report for 2019 was also included in the documents,

however, only for the sake of comparison - There was no need to go into details with it. The Trust Fund Reports were very difficult documents to read. The very bottom line in the documents showed the actual amount available in the Trust Fund Reserve. This amount was split into the mandatory reserve of 85,837 USD, which was kept for the case that a short fall in contributions had to be covered. 37,604 USD could theoretically be withdrawn from the Trust Fund Reserve for the purposes of the budget. The last budget resolution planned that every year a certain amount from the Trust Fund Reserve be withdrawn to cover the budget, since it could not be covered only by the contributions of the Parties. In 2019, it became obvious that withdrawals from the Trust Fund could no longer be made, as the bad exchange rate had melted the reserve. Luckily, for 2020, and the same would be the case for 2021, no withdrawals from the reserve were necessary, which should allow it to stabilise and get healthy again.

b) *Projection of the financial situation in 2021 including voluntary contributions*

Mr. Streit referred to Doc.EUROBATS.StC18.5 and commented that the Secretariat received two regular annual voluntary contributions – the biggest one from Germany and also one from Luxembourg. In 2020, the Secretariat also received two earmarked voluntary contributions (from Croatia and Malta) for the organisation of the AC meeting. Since the AC could not take place in 2020 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the two countries kindly agreed to allow the Secretariat to use the funds for the AC meeting in the following year. In addition to these funds, the Secretariat also from time to time received voluntary contributions from Switzerland. Unfortunately, this did not happen every year as it depended whether there were any activities or projects Switzerland wanted to support. One more voluntary contribution was that of Monaco. Due to the difficult financial situation that emerged in 2019, Monaco offered to pay 30,000 EUR per year for three years into the regular budget of EUROBATS. This generous voluntary contribution significantly helped to bring the Agreement back into the healthy condition in which it was now. Ms. Nedinge expressed her gratitude to those countries who contributed to EUROBATS budget. Unfortunately, Sweden was not in the position to do so because of its own budgetary issues. Ms. Geschier asked how the Agreement could thank those Parties. Mr. Streit explained that this was usually done during the meetings, especially during MoPs, when many country representatives could hear it. In some cases, the Secretariat also sent appreciation letters.

c) *Staffing situation in the Secretariat*

Mr. Streit explained that this topic had already been covered. He mentioned that all the posts, except for the post of the Executive Secretary, were at 50 percent post occupancy. Only at times and upon the availability of funds, the post occupancy of the Scientific Officer had been increased to 80 percent, which was necessary because of the enormous work P2 did to support the Advisory Committee. Hopefully, the post occupancy could be stabilised at this level, or even go to 100 percent. Additionally, the two administrative assistants regularly worked overtime, so that it might be considered to increase their post occupancy to 80 percent as well. However, this would depend on the financial situation.

d) *Secretariat Work Plan*

Mr. Streit referred to Doc.EUROBATS.StC18.9 and explained that the Secretariat had been preparing such documents since quite a number of years, which displayed what exactly each of the Secretariat staff members was doing and how much time these activities consumed. The current plan was still under some reservations due to the uncertainty how the situation with the pandemic would develop. Currently, it assumed that the meetings would take place as normal. At times the number of hours required for a certain activity needed to be adjusted. Accordingly, any changes in the work plan, in relation to the previous one, were written in italics and underlined, with the current and previous amount of working time stated.

Mr. Charles-Henri de Barsac asked whether it was possible to get a presentation of Inf.EUROBATS.StC18.2 containing a summary of the EPI projects conducted in 2020. Mr. Streit explained that, to apply for funding under the EUROBATS Projects Initiative, any Non-Governmental Organisation could submit its project application. The deadline for the submission of project proposals was October each year. Once the Secretariat received the proposals, it forwarded them to the EPI Evaluation Group, which had been elected by the Advisory Committee. It was a group of experienced experts who had a close look at the projects and evaluated them, sometimes also asking for amendments to project proposals. The EPI Evaluation Group then sent its evaluation and the ranking of the projects to the Secretariat, taking into account criteria such as the transboundary character of the projects, its contribution to the Conservation and Management Plan of the Agreement, etc. The Secretariat would then try to secure funding for those projects that were ranked with high priority. In that sense, the Secretariat had no influence on the selection of projects, otherwise it would get in a difficult situation when it came to the distribution

of funds. Ms. Tine Meyer-Cord also clarified that the funding threshold for EPI projects was 10,000 EUR, that there was a template the AC had produced which needed to be used for project applications, and that there were also some technical and administrative requirements from the UN side – e.g., that the funds should not be used mainly for procurement, etc.

8. 30th anniversary of the signing of the Agreement and upcoming international events in nature conservation relevant for bats and the Agreement

Mr. Streit explained that EUROBATS had a sort of a floating anniversary. On the one hand, the Agreement was adopted on the margins of the third Conference of the Parties of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) that took place in Geneva, in September 1991. On the other hand, United Kingdom as the sponsor of the Agreement – one of its initiators and the Depository, officially opened the Agreement for signature in London on the 5th of December 1991. Considering that December was not a nice time for celebrations, and with the COVID-19 pandemic on the top of it all, the intention was to celebrate the anniversary in 2022, during the following face-to-face meeting. On EUROBATS website, there was information about the material that was specially produced for the 30th anniversary of the Agreement and the 25th anniversary of the International Bat Night (IBN): A poster of all bat species occurring in the Agreement area, a EUROBATS anniversary sticker, a special poster for announcing the 25th IBN, bat postcards and stickers, etc. In addition to that, in 2020, the Secretariat funded a portion of the print and took over most of the dissemination of the German version of the comic “Bono’s adventures”, a story about the migration of bats, written and designed by the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research in Berlin (IZW). In close collaboration with the IZW, the Secretariat also translated the comic into English, which was printed in 2021. Referring again to the celebration of the Agreement’s anniversaries, Mr. Streit mentioned that there was a tradition, started by the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, to plant a tree with a small memorial plate on the UN campus. The Executive Secretary was attempting to organise such a celebration for EUROBATS as well and was in contact with the administration unit of the UN campus. As soon as the date for this event was known, the Secretariat would announce it and the delegates were welcome to join. It would not be a big ceremony, but it would be something lasting. Mr. Schall explained that the German Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety used the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the International Bat Night to publish a press release in German:

<https://www.eurobats.org/sites/default/files/documents/news/Pressemitteilung%20BMU.pdf> , which was also done by the EUROBATS Secretariat in English and German:

https://www.eurobats.org/sites/default/files/25%20years%20of%20International%20Bat%20Night_english.pdf. Mr. Schall suggested that the delegates could similarly make use of the 30th anniversary of the Agreement for public relations. Mr. Simon Mackown asked whether there was a specific date to fix these arrangements around. Mr. Streit explained that the first occasion for arranging anniversary celebrations was the IBN, which was every year scheduled for the last full weekend in August. However, since there were often local deviations regarding the date for the IBN events, it might be possible that there were still some outstanding IBN celebrations, which could be well used for this purpose. The real, formal, anniversary date was the 5th of December, and especially for the United Kingdom, this was a very good additional occasion for marking the 30th anniversary.

Action point 3: The Secretariat to inform the Focal Points as to the date for the tree planting activity. StC delegates to make use of EUROBATS anniversaries for public relation purposes.

9. **Preparations for the 9th Session of the Meeting of Parties**

Mr. Streit informed the delegates that Croatia was intending to host the next MoP and that the Secretariat hoped for the formal decision to be made soon. This question was scheduled to be discussed in Croatia at one of the following government meetings. The host was in an advanced stage of planning: Quite a few details as to where the meeting could be hosted, which facilities were available, etc. were already known. Therefore, the Secretariat was under the impression that the government meeting was only a formality which needed to be awaited before going public with the information. Once the formal decision was made, the Secretariat would start with preparations and the details would be communicated to the Parties and Non-Party Range States (NPRS) as soon as possible. Mr. Schall asked about the timing of the next MoP. Mr. Streit explained that the usual timing of MoPs was the end of September, however, it very much depended on the host country and the facility. Only when concrete logistical preparations started, more details could be known. Mr. Schall also repeated the request from Germany's Scientific Focal Point regarding the availability of online reporting system for submitting national reports prior to MoP – it would be desirable to make it available to the Parties by the end of

this year. Mr. Schall also suggested that Spain should be invited to take part in the following MoP as well as in the joint StC/AC meeting. In his answer, Mr. Streit expressed his hopes that the online reporting system would be up and running again very soon. He explained that it was a joint system with the entire CMS family, however, that each Agreement had its own specific questions. Currently, there were some technical problems that were being worked on, and the Secretariat would inform all its Focal Points as soon as the system could be used again. He also reminded the delegates that the formal deadline for the submission of the national reports was 90 day before the MoP, which for MoP9 implied late spring/early summer 2022. Referring to the second question of Mr. Schall, the Executive Secretary stated that Spain was invited to all EUROBATS meetings. In the past, usually a scientific representative took part in EUROBATS AC meetings, however, at the last in person AC meeting that took place in Skopje in 2019, Spain for the first time also participated with a representative from the government, from the Ministry of Environment. Mr. Charles-Henri de Barsac asked about the status Spain had at these meetings. Mr. Streit explained that NPRS representatives were just observers at these meetings and could not participate in decision making. However, it was also important for Range State representatives to be invited to EUROBATS meetings to see the benefits of becoming a member and to see how much work was done at these meetings. NPRS representatives were always invited to EUROBATS meetings because their work started long before their country officially joined the Agreement. Mr. Streit also reminded the delegates that the following StC meeting would be bigger than the current one as at that meeting draft resolutions would be prepared, which was the reason why more countries sent their representatives to such meetings. The Secretariat also encouraged that as many Party representatives as possible attend the StC/AC joint meetings since it was important to hear the voices of all the Parties and since it made the situation at MoPs easier when most of the representatives were informed on how the budget was prepared. This helped the budget negotiations run more smoothly.

Action point 4: The Secretariat to inform the Parties' Focal Points when the online reporting system for national reports was available again.

10. Any other business

Mr. Charles-Henri de Barsac asked for further clarifications regarding the invitation to the international workshop on conservation of bats during building insulation circulated by the Secretariat. Mr. Streit explained that Czech Republic asked the

Secretariat to use its distribution lists to inform the Parties and Non-Party Range States about this workshop at which they were all welcome to participate. However, the Secretariat was not involved in the organisation of this workshop and had no further details to it.

11. Date and venue of the 19th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Ms. Geschier asked whether there was any other meeting of the Standing Committee between this and the meeting in spring 2022. Mr. Streit explained that normally there was no need for that, except in case of an unforeseeable emergency, which, hopefully, would not arise.

12. Close of Meeting

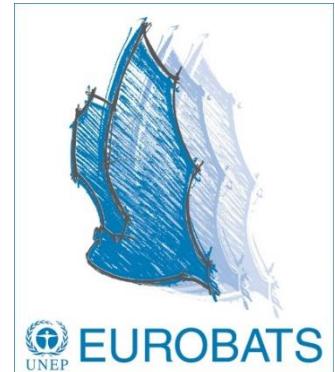
In conclusion of the meeting, the StC Chair thanked the members for their collaboration and expressed her pleasure at meeting them in person at the following meeting. The StC members thanked the Chair for a well conducted meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 16:04.

18th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Videoconference, 16 September 2021

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