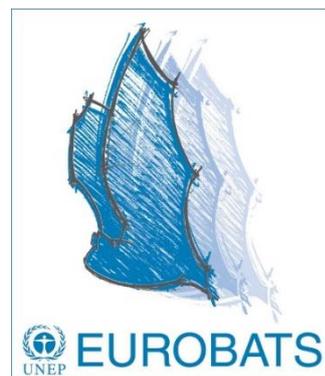


22nd Meeting of the Standing Committee

Videoconference, 9 November 2023

(15:00 – 16:00 h CET)

Record



1. Attendance

This is listed in Annex 1 to the Record.

2. Opening remarks

The Chair of the Standing Committee and EUROBATS administrative Focal Point for Belgium, Mr. Jeroen Panis, opened the second meeting of the Standing Committee for the current year. He further reminded the delegates of the difficult budget discussion that took place during the 9th Session of the Meeting of the Parties (MoP9) and the compromise that was reached then. It was the goal of the Standing Committee (StC) to safeguard this compromise and to respect the budget priorities that were identified by the Parties. Mr. Panis concluded by expressing his pleasure that some savings were expected to be made in 2023 so that the Committee could discuss the priorities to address (staffing issue and the organisation of the Advisory Committee (AC) meeting the following year) and gave the floor to Mr. Streit, EUROBATS Executive Secretary.

Mr. Streit welcomed all the participants to the meeting, the goals of which were well summarised by Mr. Panis. He expected the meeting to be quite short and straight forward considering the situation, the details of which would follow later.

3. Adoption of the agenda (Doc.EUROBATS.StC22.1.Rev.1)

There being no crucial remarks about the agenda, it was adopted.

4. Budget priorities for 2024 based on the expected availability of funds (Doc.EUROBATS.StC22.3)

Mr. Streit explained that the only document prepared for this meeting was a provisional expenditure report, the purpose of which was to give an overview of the financial situation at the end of September 2023. Mr. Streit emphasised that this was not the official document which could only be prepared for the next meeting of the Standing Committee and after the financial year ended.

On the positive side, the Executive Secretary could report that the budget seemed to be sufficient and savings of about 20,000 EUR could be expected at the end of the year, depending on several factors, mainly the exchange rate between EUR and USD. However, Mr. Streit had previously hoped for a higher amount of savings that would give a margin to discuss how the surplus could be spent, which, in his opinion, was currently not the case.

He further explained that there was no news on Spain's accession to the Agreement. The Secretariat had not been informed that the accession had been cancelled, however, there was also no progress in this regard owing to the difficult government establishment process in the country.

On the other hand, due to the letter sent by the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee to all the Parties, the Secretariat had received several responses from the countries willing to make a voluntary contribution in support of the organisation of an in-person meeting of the Advisory Committee the following year. It was a touching gesture that Montenegro gave 700 EUR as a voluntary contribution. Malta made a voluntary contribution of 5,000 EUR and Ireland of 1,000 EUR. Mr. Streit thanked all those Parties for their kind support. Unfortunately, the funds gathered so far were still insufficient to finance an in-person meeting of the Advisory Committee in 2024. As the year was not yet over, there might be some additional contributions from the Parties, but the Secretariat had not received any indication of it. One more important issue to be born in mind during the discussion referred to the recruitment, i.e. relocation costs for the new Executive Secretary. Certain amount of savings would have to be reserved for these costs as they were not foreseen in the budget. These costs varied and could not be estimated until the recruitment had been finalised.

Ms. Zrinka Domazetović, the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee and EUROBATS administrative Focal Point for Croatia, informed the participants that the regular contribution of Croatia was still being processed and that, after this had been finalised, the possibility of making voluntary contributions would be considered. She hoped that Croatia could make some voluntary contributions to both EUROBATS and AEWA (African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement). Further, the question was raised about the status of payments of regular contributions and whether there were any Parties with arrears. Mr. Streit could not give a definite answer to this question but believed that there were no countries with drastic debts. Assuming the question referred to one particular country that had significant arrears at the time of MoP9, Mr. Streit informed the

participants that the Party did not manage to pay the entire debt, but that, in the meantime, assessed contributions for at least two years had been received.

To proceed with the discussion on the budget priorities that could be financed by the savings, Mr. Panis asked how much the increase to 80 percent post occupancy of the second Administrative Assistant would cost per year. Mr. Streit answered that it amounted to approx. 30,000 EUR, which could be secured on the regular basis only if Spain would join EUROBATS. Mr. Panis concluded that the savings were obviously not sufficient to raise the post occupancy of the second Administrative Assistant. He further commented that the budget needed for the organisation of an in-person AC meeting would be around 20,000 EUR. The Executive Secretary explained that the total costs were higher, at least 30,000 EUR, out of which at least 20,000 EUR had to be provided from the regular budget and about 10,000 EUR came from the German regular voluntary contribution to cover the costs of participation of delegates coming from certain countries with economies in transition. Mr. Streit further stated that costs of several AC meetings had been compared and that the estimation of 30,000 EUR was reliable. Referring to this figure, Ms. Ruth Petermann, the Chair of the Advisory Committee and EUROBATS scientific Focal Point for Germany, asked if the costs could be kept lower if an “AC light” meeting would be organised. Asked to define “AC light”, she explained that the focus could be only on the active members who had signed up for the Intersessional Working Groups. Mr. Streit raised his concern to the StC members that there were no scenarios in place for such a situation and that it would need very careful consideration. He explained that a number of the most active and competent members of the Advisory Committee did not have any official role, i.e. they were not appointed Focal Points. If the decision would be made to organise a reduced meeting, which criteria should be used to decide whom to invite. The official Focal Points would rightly expect to be invited, and if the additional experts would also be invited, the number of participants in such a meeting would remain almost the same as in any other Advisory Committee meeting.

Mr. Charles-Henry de Barsac, EUROBATS administrative Focal Point for France, enquired about the document he had asked for during the previous Standing Committee meeting, listing the costs of all the options and priorities that could be financed. He also added that he would support staying in line with the priorities as they had been decided at MoP9. Mr. Panis commented that, since there were not enough savings to finance any of the priorities, there was no point in further discussing this agenda item. Mr. Streit mentioned that the Secretariat might still receive some additional voluntary contributions,

but that these could currently not be counted on. Mr. Panis emphasised that, in case sufficient additional funds would be received, it could be considered to organise an in-person AC meeting the following year, but not at the cost of the regular budget.

Ms. Marie Nedinge, EUROBATS administrative Focal Point for Sweden, mentioned that, though she liked Ms. Petermann's idea, she would rather either organise a full meeting or have no in-person meeting at all.

The Executive Secretary explained that the Secretariat and the Advisory Committee already had experience with online meetings, as only online meetings were possible during the times of the COVID-19 pandemic. These were organised in two phases. Firstly, each Intersessional Working Group met separately to prepare their input for the plenary part, and then the plenary took place. This was not ideal, but people got used to online meetings and this option could be used since progress was urgently needed in the work of the Agreement. Mr. Streit also asked the Committee to allow him a personal remark on the subject. He very much hoped that a similar situation – where the funds for the AC meetings would be so dramatically reduced at a MoP – would never be repeated in the future. He had been long enough in his position to know that the Advisory Committee was the heart of the Agreement: All progress over the many years, and all of the most valuable and demanded publications and most of the draft resolutions had been prepared by the Advisory Committee. The fact that there were so few draft resolutions prepared for MoP9 was due to the break in the work of the Advisory Committee caused by the pandemic. Currently, there was again a two-year break ahead of the Advisory Committee, not because of the pandemic, but because of the lack of funds. Such a situation should be avoided in the future. Mr. Panis commented that the situation at the last MoP was a perfect storm caused by the last step of getting back to the UN scale of contributions as well as the high inflation rate and that it would, hopefully, never have to be repeated. Ms. Nedinge agreed with Mr. Streit that MoP9 was not at its best, also because the online meetings preceding it had not been successful, which had a spill-over effect on MoP9. Online meetings with so many participants needed to be carefully prepared and it took a lot of effort to make them work. And even though people got used to online meetings, in-person meetings were very important. Ms. Nedinge fought as much as she could at MoP9 to secure more funds for EUROBATS, but it was not possible, and she was sorry for that. Therefore, she now pleaded at the countries that did not want to agree to a raise in regular contributions to consider making voluntary contributions so that the very important meeting next spring could take place in person.

Mr. Panis then suggested shifting the AC meeting to sometime later in the year, e.g., to October. Until then the Standing Committee could have a clearer picture if some savings could also be made in 2024 and if there would be sufficient funds available to organise an in-person meeting. The Standing Committee could meet before October to discuss this issue. Mr. Streit supported the proposal –the financial situation could improve in 2024, but currently this was difficult to predict. He suggested that the StC could meet end of June 2024. Ms. Petermann was asked if this timing for the meeting would be acceptable for the Advisory Committee. She answered that the timing of the meetings should accompany the progress of the AC. Since an in-person meeting was definitely planned for 2026, which was the MoP year, she would prefer to have an online meeting in 2024 and save all the funds available to have an in-person meeting in 2025. She also pleaded for sticking to the usual schedule of the AC meetings, i.e. having it in spring. Postponing one meeting to later in the year could mean having to postpone the consequent meetings as well, leading to having fewer meetings in the entire cycle. Though online meetings were not ideal – this had already been discussed and the setbacks were known to all – Ms. Petermann would prefer having an online meeting in 2024 but sticking to the usual schedule. Ms. Nedinge understood the reasoning of Ms. Petermann but, for the reason of online meetings being quite difficult, she was in favour of trying to have a in-person meeting in autumn 2024. If this could not work out, there was still enough time to organise an online meeting. Ms. Domazetović was more in line with Ms. Petermann’s proposal. Since currently there were not enough voluntary contributions, even if sufficient funds could be gathered to have an AC meeting in autumn 2024, she was sceptical that again enough funds could be gathered for a meeting in 2025. As it was not realistic to have three in-person meetings in such a short period of time, she would also be in favour of funding the one before the MoP year. Mr. Panis summarised that there was not much enthusiasm for changing the schedule of AC meetings. Ms. Céline Impagliazzo, EUROBATS administrative Focal Point for Monaco, asked whether there was then a need for an additional Standing Committee meeting to review the financial situation if no in-person meeting of the Advisory Committee was planned for 2024. Mr. Panis replied that the Standing Committee would have its regular meeting at the usual time, which was May 2024 and concluded the discussion on this agenda item.

5. Update on the recruitment of a new Executive Secretary

Mr. Panis informed the participants about the meeting Ms. Petermann and he had with the Executive Secretary of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of

Wild Animals (CMS), Ms. Amy Fraenkel. Ms. Fraenkel agreed that EUROBATS should be involved in the recruitment process of the new Executive Secretary through the Chair of the Standing Committee. She mentioned that the process would be starting any time soon, that the new EUROBATS Executive Secretary had to be coming from one of the Parties and that there were still some legal issues that needed to be clarified.

Mr. Streit further explained that Ms. Fraenkel would be acting as the hiring manager in this process. He informed the delegates that the job description had been finalised and that it was hoped to be approved soon. The job description was necessary for the job opening, which was expected to be posted in the near future. All Parties and Non-Party Range States would be informed about that and asked to further disseminate the job opening. It would be advertised for 30 to 40 days, after which the analysis of the received applications would start. The goal was to have the new Executive Secretary selected before Mr. Streit retired in order to ensure a smooth transition. Mr. Streit informed that he would be one of the panel members.

6. Any other business

There was no other business to be discussed.

7. Date and venue of the 23rd Meeting of the Standing Committee

Mr. Panis reminded the participants that the next meeting was planned for late May/ early June 2024, and that the proposal for the date would be circulated in March 2024.

8. Close of meeting

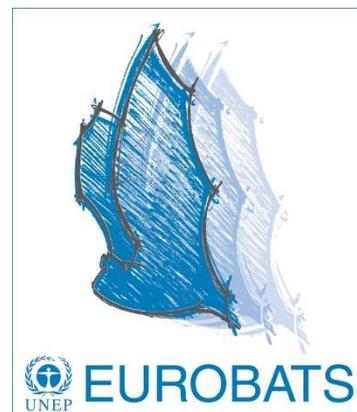
In conclusion, Mr. Streit thanked all the delegates for their participation in the meeting. He was looking forward to the next StC meeting which would then be the last meeting of a EUROBATS body that he would attend before his retirement, which was planned for July 2024. Ms. Nedinge used the opportunity to inform the delegates that this was also the last Standing Committee meeting she attended as the representative of Sweden. Starting from the next meeting, her colleague, Ms. Helene Lindahl, would be the Swedish representative. Ms. Nedinge thanked the delegates and the Secretariat for good cooperation over the years. Mr. Panis thanked Ms. Nedinge for all the years of her engagement and work with EUROBATS, as well as other delegates for their participation in the meeting and, there being no further matters to discuss, he closed the meeting at 15:59.

22nd Meeting of the Standing Committee

Videoconference, 9 November 2023

(15:00 – 16:00 h CET)

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