

Mission to Mostar (Bosnia and



Mostar and Neretva river. Photo Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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OBJECTIVES OF THE MISSION

- Discussion about the possibility that the State of Bosnia & Herzegovina (composed of two Federal States: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic Srpska) declares its succession to the former Yugoslav Federation to become a Contracting Party to the Convention on Wetlands (including the designation of a Ramsar Site).
- Discussion with the Authorities of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (one of 10 cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) about plans for the integrated management of the lower Neretva area (including Hutovo Blato).
- Discussion with the local Authorities responsible for the Hutovo Blato area about the proposed management measures and visit of the Hutovo Blato area and its surroundings.
- Meeting with the Croatian Authorities to discuss the integrated management proposals for the lower Neretva area and possible transboundary cooperation, including the

follow-up of the seminar on "Socio-economic aspects of the use of the Neretva valley" held on 11-13 November 1997 in Metkovic.

- Drafting of a project proposal or concept to be further developed and subsequently submitted to international donors to obtain financial and technical support for the elaboration and implementation of integrated management measures for the lower Neretva floodplain (including Hutovo Blato).

MAIN RESULTS

1) Declaration of succession of Bosnia & Herzegovina to become a Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention

- UNESCO informed the Ramsar Bureau on 14 March about a letter received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sarajevo declaring the wish of Bosnia & Herzegovina to become a Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention. This was noted with satisfaction and the members of the mission, including the Croatian delegation, congratulated the National and Cantonal Authorities for this significant development.
- It was however noted that the designation of a Ramsar Site is still missing. It was suggested that Hutovo Blato should become the first Ramsar Site of Bosnia & Herzegovina. In order that the Hutovo Blato Ramsar Site would be adjacent to the Croatian Ramsar Site "Neretva River Delta", it should also include areas outside the actual Nature Park (Park Prirode), i.e.

the floodplain areas of the Neretva, Brejava, and Trebizat rivers, and the Bosnia & Herzegovina part of the Prut marshes.

- The delineation of the Ramsar Site boundaries on a map, to be sent to UNESCO, is a high priority to finalise Bosnia & Herzegovina's accession to the Ramsar Convention.

2) Ratification of SPAMI Protocol

- The mission encouraged the National Authorities of Croatia and of Bosnia & Herzegovina to ratify the new Protocol on Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance under the Barcelona Convention. This would entitle them to benefit from possible specific technical and financial support for SPAMIs.

3) Declaration of the creation of a Nature Park in the Croatian Neretva River Delta

- Ms Radovic of the newly created Croatian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning informed the participants of the imminent declaration of a Nature Park covering the lower Neretva floodplain and adjacent hillsides, based on the new law on Nature Parks, currently under consultation. The establishment of a Nature Park will also include the establishment of a local management authority. Croatian Nature Parks profit from support from the central government, unlike the existing Nature Reserves in the Neretva Delta that depend on the Dubrovnik-Neretva County (Zupanija).

- The preparation of the Physical Plan for the Dubrovnik-Neretva County has already been finalised, taking into account existing natural and cultural heritage. In addition, specific management planning will be required by law for the territory of the future Nature Park.

4) Current LIFE project "Development of new management policy for Hutovo Blato wetlands, Bosnia and Herzegovina"

- The field visits and the meeting organised in the Nature Park Hutovo Blato showed the natural richness and the existing tourism potential of the site which merits to be better known. The Nature Park profits from the strong support of Capljina municipality. The LIFE project leader (Ivan Buntic) of the Ministry of Civil Engineering, Physical Planning and Environmental Protection of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton informed the participants about current studies under the LIFE project that are considered very valuable follow-up activities to the 1997 LIFE project cover-

ing the Croatian Neretva Delta (as part of the MedWet2 project).

· Deputy Minister Saravanja informed the mission about the seminar planned for mid-May 2000 to discuss wetland related legislation in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia and at international level, management questions for the Hutovo Blato area, and the cooperation with the authorities on the Croatian side. It was felt that the publication of the results of this seminar will be important for future transboundary cooperation. Copies in English should also be sent to the members of the mission.

· It was suggested that the Ministry involves actively local NGOs to carry out activities to raise public awareness about the values of Hutovo Blato and to educate the public and schoolchildren.

5) Transboundary cooperation for the wise use of the lower Neretva area

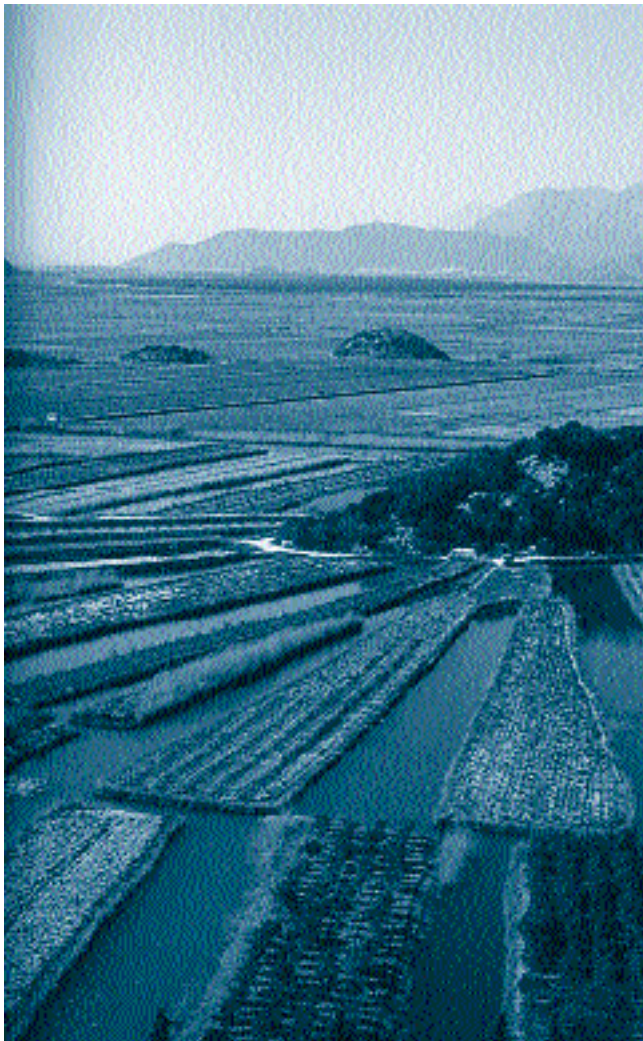
· During the meeting in Metkovic and the field visit of Kuti Lake, the Croatian and Bosnia & Herzegovina delegations, the authorities of the Dubrovnic-Neretva County, of Metkovic, Ploce and Opu-zen, and local NGOs strongly declared their wish for a joint management of the lower Neretva area. This was noted with satisfaction and reference was made to the useful results of the 1997 seminar in Metkovic on "Socio-economic Aspects of the Use of the Neretva Valley". The Barcelona and Ramsar Conventions are endorsing these promising developments and will send official letters of support to the Croatian and Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministers at national level.

· Additional discussions at the Ministry in Mostar concluded on the following Action Points:

- Designation of Hutovo Blato by Bosnia & Herzegovina as a Ramsar Site and its notification to the RAC/SPA for inclusion as a SPA in the Directory of Marine and Coastal Areas of the Mediterranean Region; designation of the Neretva Delta Nature Park by Croatia (cf. above).

- Creation of a bilateral management committee by the relevant Authorities of Bosnia & Herzegovina and Croatia.

- This management committee will have to identify, based on the studies of the LIFE



Neretva flood plain, Ramsar site in Croatia. Photo Tobias Salathé

projects (MedWet2 in Croatia and Hutovo Blato), priority objectives for the management of the entire area.

- The management committee should also identify local training needs. These should then be submitted to the MedWet Coordinator and RAC/SPA for technical and financial support.

- Based on the identified key management objectives, the management committee - with the help of the MedWet Team (EKBY) and of RAC/SPA - shall start the development of an integrated management plan and of concrete project proposals (including budgets) for subsequent submission to specific donors. The Ramsar and Barcelona Conventions will actively endorse and support such proposals for international technical and financial support.

· Ms Radovic and Mr Vego pointed out that they consider the possibility of a shared

project for the management plan for the lower Neretva valley, prepared according to the "Guidelines on management planning for Ramsar Sites and other wetlands" (Annex Resolution V.7). Some phases of the project could start even before the management authority of the future Nature Park will be established. It could be envisaged that they submit a proposal for project preparation assistance (deadlines: end of April 2000, end of March 2001) to the Ramsar Small Grants Fund (for evaluation criteria and operational guidelines cf.

http://ramsar.org/key_sgf_index.htm.

· It was concluded that Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia should officially present these significant developments to the forthcoming MedWet/Com3 meeting in April 2000 in Djerba (Tunisia), and that they should profit from this opportunity to discuss these issues with other members of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee and potential donors present at the meeting.

· Deputy Minister Karavanja informed the participants about the starting transregional cooperation on the development of Adriatic river catchment basins, including 3 Counties on the Croatian side and 3 Cantons in Bosnia & Herzegovina. This will provide a general framework for transboundary cooperation in the lower Neretva valley and other, nearby international river catchments.



Hutovo Blato (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Photo Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The authors of this report would like to thank their hosts in Mostar, notably Deputy Minister Saravanja and Mr Vego for their hospitality and their excellent preparation of the mission programme.

They would also like to thank Ms Radovic from the Croatian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning for her pivotal preparatory work and contribution for the future transboundary cooperation. ●