



Funded by  
the European Union

**EU4Environment**  
Green Economy in Eastern Partner Countries

# EU4ENVIRONMENT

## Advancing Biodiversity Conservation in Eastern Partnership Countries

### Draft Summary Record

**Date:** 15-16 February 2024

**Venue:** Radisson Blu Leograd Hotel, Chisinau, Moldova

**Format:** Hybrid meeting (in person & via Zoom)

**Languages:** English with simultaneous interpretation into Romanian, Ukrainian and Russian

Action implemented by:



## *Draft Summary Record*

The regional meeting "Advancing Biodiversity Conservation in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Countries" was held on 15-16 February 2024 in Chisinau (the Republic of Moldova) in a hybrid format. Organised within the framework of the EU4Environment program, this event aimed to take stock of progress on biodiversity protection, discuss opportunities for improved funding mechanisms in this area, facilitate peer learning, and reflect on national ownership and sustainability of biodiversity protection activities. Besides discussing overall progress and plans for future, the meeting included three thematic sessions on: (i) financing afforestation/reforestation investment projects to ensure biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration; (ii) advancing the Emerald Network and Natura2000 and (iii) EU Deforestation Regulation. The meeting brought together government representatives from the EaP countries, EU institutions, IFIs, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), academia, and the World Bank as the meeting's main organiser. In addition to these participants, the launch of the report on high conservation value forests in Moldova on February 16 also included journalists and mass media. A site visit was organised in the afternoon of the second day. Meeting documentation is available [electronically](#).

### **DAY 1**

#### **Item 1. Opening Session**

In her opening remarks, Iordanca-Rodica Iordanov, the **Minister of Environment of Moldova**, highlighted the critical importance of biodiversity conservation in the context of climate change. Mrs. Iordanov acknowledged the invaluable support from international partners and stressed the significance of a robust framework for policy dialogue. She underscored the meeting's pivotal role in reviewing the EU4Environment Program's key outcomes and agreeing on next steps. Finally, Mrs. Iordanov noted the heavy tasks facing EU candidate countries in aligning their laws with EU legislation, norms, and standards.

Representing the World Bank, Inguna Dobraja, **Country Manager for Moldova**, highlighted the increasing significance of biodiversity protection. She outlined the World Bank's robust partnership with Moldova, which is encapsulated in the Country Partnership Framework. This collaboration aims to support Moldova's transition to a new economic growth model, addressing both immediate crises and long-term development goals to further the nation's EU accession. She emphasized the growing focus on climate change, which includes initiatives for improved management of water resources and forests. The World Bank's commitment to working with the Moldovan government was reaffirmed, with a particular emphasis on knowledge sharing and analytics, including the forthcoming Country Climate and Development Report. Ms. Dobraja commended the Ministry's work on long-term development programs and expressed enthusiasm for the World Bank's involvement. She also mentioned the EU4Environment Program in Moldova, which provides policy recommendations to inform actions on biodiversity, community engagement in natural resource management, and guidelines and tools for sustainable practices, including forest certification and legal timber trade. Ms. Dobraja cited similar initiatives in other countries, such as Armenia, where the EU4Environment project's investment yielded substantial funding through a new project, exemplifying the impact and potential of such programs. She concluded

by assuring continued close collaboration with the Moldovan Minister and her team, pledging the World Bank's support, particularly in implementation efforts.

Adam Grodzicki, Deputy Head of Cooperation at the **EU Delegation to Moldova**, emphasized the value of working together to address challenges related to climate change and environmental degradation, and to grasp new growth opportunities. He highlighted the European Green Deal's critical role for the EU's transformation into a green, sustainable, and competitive economy. The Green Deal's principles are integrated into the EU's international partnerships, including the EaP Economic and Investment Plan (EIP). The Plan promotes sustainable, inclusive growth by focusing on the twin digital and green transitions and by supporting policy reforms, governance enhancement, infrastructure modernization, innovation, and job creation. In conjunction with the EIP, the EU intends to mobilise up to 17 billion Euros in investment projects, with a focus on areas such as sustainable transport, energy, energy efficiency, water, and circular economy. Mr. Grodzicki mentioned the EU Biodiversity Strategy and EU Forest Strategy as key pillars of the European Green Deal. He shared his hope that the meeting would offer a platform for discussing how investments, public and private, can be attracted into sustainable forestry and biodiversity protection. Mr. Grodzicki stressed that as a candidate country, Moldova will need to embrace EU policy targets and practices as concerns forest management, including in relation with their carbon sink function. This should be done in synergy with better management of river basins, protected areas, agricultural land and pastures, and a sustainable bioeconomy more generally. He thanked the World Bank for organizing the event and emphasized the EU's commitment to supporting Moldova and other countries in the region in their green transition, despite recent challenges, including the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

## **Item 2. Key Achievements with EU4Environment Support**

In this session the representatives of each of the EaP countries presented the progress and key achievements under EU4Environment Program as concerns biodiversity conservation and sustainable forestry. These interventions were followed by a statement made on behalf of the EaP Civil Society Forum (CSF). The following key messages were conveyed by the speakers:

- **Moldova:** Iordanca-Rodica Iordanov, Minister of Environment and EU4Environment Focal Point, outlined the alignment of Moldova's policy framework with the EU. Minister Iordanov provided an overview of policy targets set by the Government and stressed that Moldova is focusing on forest institution reform, legal framework enhancements, and conservation measures for sustainable resource management. Notable achievements, supported by EU4Environment, include the initiation of discussions, formulation and launch of the National Forest Extension and Rehabilitation Program (NFERP) aimed at afforestation on 145,000 hectares to bolster climate mitigation efforts and sustainable forest management. Additionally, milestones such as the completion of the High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF) study and the adoption of legislation on Emerald sites were highlighted. Other accomplishments involve progress on the Emerald Network through roadmap development and site management planning.
- **Armenia:** a joint presentation was made by Lusine Avetisyan, Head of Strategic Policy Department, Ministry of Environment, and Tatevik Zuerker, Bern Convention National Focal Point, Ministry of Environment. Lusine Avetisyan thanked the EU4Environment program for their support, aligning with Armenia's government program, particularly emphasizing the significance of Result Area 4 for Bern Convention implementation.

Tatevik Zuerker presented Armenia's Action Plan for 2021-2026, covering over 20 strategic environmental targets, and highlighted key areas of focus within the government's environmental strategy, including Lake Sevan ecosystem conservation, sustainable forest management, protected nature areas, biodiversity conservation, and environmental monitoring enhancement. She also discussed country's progress on aligning national legislation with the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, particularly focusing on directives related to bird and habitat conservation. Notable achievements under the EU4Environment program were highlighted, such as finalizing reviews of candidate Emerald sites, developing management plan guidelines, and initiating capacity-building activities for stakeholders on biodiversity conservation and monitoring. Future priorities include enhancing the sustainability of the Emerald Network by engaging local communities, improving wild harvest management, integrating biodiversity and climate actions, and implementing innovative financial mechanisms for network sustainability.

- **Azerbaijan:** Gulana Hajieva, EU4Environment World Bank Program Coordinator in Azerbaijan, presented recent achievements of the Azerbaijan government, including re-engagement in identifying Emerald sites, prioritization of sustainable forest development, signing of cooperation agreements with Georgia on park management, establishment of a Public Council for civil society collaboration, and development of work plans under the EU4Environment program. Ms. Hajieva also highlighted achievements under the EU4Environment program, such as:
  - i. Preparation of Emerald Network Development Guidelines and recommendations for the Emerald Roadmap, legal framework assessments for harmonization.
  - ii. Assessment of the legal framework and development of recommendations to assist the Government in harmonizing existing legislation for the effective development of the Emerald Network in Azerbaijan
  - iii. Pilot projects for Emerald Network Management Plans in three sites.
  - iv. Development of intersectoral Capacity Building Programs.
  - v. Consultancy to involve local communities in resource management.
  - vi. Planned activities for strategic financing in forest and natural resources management sectors.
- **Georgia:** Natia Iordanishvili, Deputy Head of the National Forestry Department, provided insights into Georgia's recent governmental achievements and initiatives. She highlighted the completion of the comprehensive National Forest Inventory, spanning the years 2019 to 2023, a significant milestone in understanding and managing the country's forest resources. Additionally, emphasis was placed on the commitment to bolstering forests' role in carbon sequestration, exemplified by the formulation of a Climate Action Plan covering the period from 2024 to 2026. Georgia's dedication to global biodiversity targets was underscored by its pledge to the "30x30" initiative under the Kunming-Montreal Framework, reflecting its proactive stance in conservation efforts. Ms. Iordanishvili also discussed the ongoing development of legislation, notably the Law on Biodiversity, emphasizing the importance of refining monitoring tools and assessment mechanisms for effective implementation. A key aspect of Georgia's approach to forestry management involves the revision of the National Forest Programme, serving as a crucial platform for stakeholder engagement and decision-making in the sector. This revision underscores the government's commitment to transparency and inclusivity in forest management practices. Under the EU4Environment program, Ms. Iordanishvili highlighted several notable

achievements, including analysis of Emerald Sites management and development of the recommendations for managing forest habitats in Emerald sites. Efforts were also initiated to promote legal, deforestation-free trade and combat illegal wood product trade, with plans to draw insights from international certification processes. Looking ahead, Georgia outlined its priorities, including support for municipal forest management and the diversification of forest ownership forms to include municipal forests. Recognizing the value of leveraging international best practices, study tours to EU countries are regarded as vital tools for gaining insights into the management challenges and success stories of Natura 2000 sites. This underscores Georgia's commitment to ongoing learning and enhancement of forestry management practices.

- **Ukraine:** During the presentation by Nataliia Baliasa, Chief Specialist of the Division of Environmental Education and Science at the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, the devastating impacts of the Russian full-scale invasion on Ukraine's biodiversity and ecosystems were highlighted. This included the occupation of 500 territories and objects of the Nature Reserve Fund by Russian forces, encompassing 82 Emerald Network Sites covering 1.9 million hectares. Additionally, over 900 territories of the Nature Reserve Fund and 160 territories of Emerald Network sites have been affected by the war, with approximately 183 thousand hectares of forests being burned. Despite these challenges, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources remains steadfast in its commitment to environmental conservation. Efforts are underway to develop the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan, draft legislation for the protection of species and habitats in Europe, address invasive alien species, establish a national monitoring system for biological and landscape diversity, and implement a climate change policy strategy until 2035. Furthermore, the implementation of Ukraine's State Forest Management Strategy until 2035 is progressing.

Roman Petrych, Chief Specialist of the Forestry Division at the Forest State Agency, provided updates on activities under the EU4Environment program. These include preparations to launch procurement for consultancy services to advance the Emerald Network in Ukraine, development of methodological guidelines for Emerald Site Management Plans, and pilot Management Plans in three selected sites. Additionally, the scope of work for consultancy services to enhance the Unified State Electronic Timber Tracking System 2.0 has been prepared, and a consultancy provider has been selected to assess climate finance and carbon pricing readiness options for the forestry sector, evaluate existing Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) arrangements, and provide improvement recommendations.

- **Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF):** Ilya Trombitsky, Executive Director of Eco-TIRAS International Association of River Keepers, highlighted several challenges facing biodiversity in Moldova and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. Moldova, being agriculturally focused with a significant portion of arable land, lacks adequate management plans for protected areas, particularly those within the Emerald Network. The issue of alien species in reforestation programs persists, and despite policy adoption, implementation remains weak, resulting in continuous biodiversity degradation. Education and professional orientation require improvement, with insufficient funding allocated to science. Mr. Trombitsky proposed EaP CSF's recommendations for all countries, including aligning policies with the EU's Nature Restoration Law, promoting

sustainable agriculture, strengthening river management plans, prioritizing local species, integrating biodiversity into various sectors, enlarging managed areas of nature reserves, involving local communities in conservation efforts, engaging youth in biodiversity education, reducing bureaucracy in research, and enhancing civil society involvement in biodiversity programs' realization and monitoring. These suggestions aim to address multifaceted challenges and foster effective biodiversity conservation across the EaP countries.

The presentations by country representatives were followed by a discussion led by Sanjay Srivastava, Practice Manager, Environment, Natural Resources and Blue Economy, Europe and Central Asia, World Bank, who posed a question to all countries: in order to achieve climate and biodiversity targets, sustainable forest management requires substantial funding. He inquired about the investment needs for the next decade and the sources of finance for environmental targets. In response:

- Ukraine emphasized **climate finance as a significant funding source**, alongside domestic investments, but stressed the necessity for developing mechanisms for service financing.
- Armenia highlighted **government allocations from the budget**, supplemented by international funding, with examples such as eco-patrol receiving joint financing.
- Moldova pointed out national and international sources of funding, underlining the **importance of enhancing domestic capacity**.
- Georgia outlined efforts to combat forest degradation, including selective cuttings for national needs, promoting sustainable wood harvesting, and diversifying forest services. Financing sources encompassed partial state budget allocations, support from EU countries, the World Bank, and the Green Climate Fund. Additionally, the National Forestry Agency generates **income from services** and has established a **donation platform for reforestation**.

During the discussion, Ana Coutinho from Gradina Moldovei posed a question to Georgia about **data on ecosystem services beyond timber**, particularly for farms near forests. Natia Iordanishvili, Deputy Head of National Forestry Department, acknowledged the existence of such data but noted its limited coverage across municipalities, with updated information available for only 20 out of 49 municipalities. Efforts are underway to identify ecosystem services in selected forest areas for household use, with a focus on pastureland management and ongoing law development.

Alexandru Vasile Sainsus from Arbiterum highlighted challenges facing Moldova's forests due to past anthropogenic activities and emphasized the **need for targeted policies for sustainable ecosystem recovery**. He also emphasized the importance of external funding, strengthening implementation capacity, engaging local entrepreneurs, improving legal frameworks, and avoiding support for afforestation programs using invasive species. Veronica Josu, Senior Specialist at the Ministry of Environment of Moldova, emphasized legislative progress, including the **adoption of a new land code and updates to the forest code**. Regarding afforestation programs, she noted the need to verify figures on the use of alien species and emphasized the

importance of native species. Natia Iordanishvili addressed methods used during Georgia's forest inventory, outlining a layered approach involving satellite imagery, fieldwork, and software systems for data analysis. This methodology, outlined in an official document, adheres to government-adopted minimum standards and can be shared with interested parties.

Fisseha Tessema Abissa, Sr. Natural Resources Management Specialist and Task Team Leader for EU4Environment at the World Bank, summarized the discussion, noting a specific activity under the EU4Environment program, implemented by the World Bank, which aims to determine appropriate financial modalities for forest management financing in each country. He emphasized the global nature of forests and the need for coordinated global efforts, suggesting that international institutions like the World Bank need to adapt their strategies accordingly.

### **Item 3. Financing Afforestation/Reforestation to Ensure Biodiversity Conservation and Ecosystem Restoration**

Sanjay Srivastava initiated the session by highlighting the crucial issue of financing for biodiversity conservation. While countries are actively developing plans and amending legislation to outline conservation roadmaps, two key questions remain: who will implement these plans and where will the funding come from? Capacity and skills within government bodies and specialist sectors, including the use of innovative technologies, are essential for effective implementation. Moreover, the modalities for implementation, whether through partnerships with civil society organizations, communities, private sectors, or financial institutions, must be incorporated into these plans.

Mr. Srivastava emphasized the **critical need for financial resources**, recognizing that government funding alone is insufficient. While grant resources are limited, borrowing for biodiversity conservation also presents challenges. Exploring innovative financing mechanisms such as carbon financing and emissions trading schemes could provide additional avenues for funding, but legislative support is essential. The EU4Environment program offers an opportunity to address these complex issues. Mr. Srivastava invited colleagues to share their experiences in navigating these challenges.

Iuliana Cantaragiu, Advisor for Environment and Climate Change, **Office of the President** presented **Moldova's National Forest Extension and Rehabilitation Program** (NFERP), emphasizing its support by the President of Moldova. Societal perception about afforestation was mentioned as an important challenge, which required extensive stakeholder dialogue. Mrs. Cantaragiu highlighted the very difficult priority setting process in a context of multiple needs and crises and limited capacity of the country. The speaker underscored the importance of popular support in setting investment priorities. Ms. Cantaragiu explained that Moldova opted for a loan to finance the program, facing obstacles like internal agency challenges and the need for additional resources beyond carbon credits. Strengthening the capacity of the national forestry agency Moldsilva is crucial, as is the need to select resilient tree species amid climate change challenges. Discussions also revolved around choosing drought-resistant crops for implementation.

Nicolas Tremblay, Task Team Leader for Agriculture, Territorial Development and Biodiversity, French Development Agency (Agence Française de Développement, AFD) presented a project aimed at **modernizing forest governance in Moldova** to support government afforestation efforts and extending the forest coverage, which at 11% of country's territory remains very limited in comparison with the EU average of 40%. The speaker referred to the particularities of forest

ownership in Moldova, with 85% of forests being in state (public) ownership and managed by the forestry agency Moldsilva, while private ownership is at only 1% of forests. The very strong political will to improve the situation in the forestry sector was highlighted, especially the fact that afforestation is a top priority for the President. The policy target of planting 15 thousand ha per year for the next 10 years is very ambitious. A new Forestry Code was developed to modernise the governance of the sector and enable the alignment with EU norms and regulations. A reform program, "Strengthening the Modernization of the Forestry Sector in Moldova," has been developed through policy dialogue involving Moldovan and French counterparts, comprising 19 tracks over 5-6 years. A **policy-based loan** (PBL) of 40 million Euros over two years has been secured, with disbursements tied to progress in the reform program. Technical assistance of 1.2 million Euros will support the government alongside the reform process. **Reform pillars within a PBL Matrix** include adoption of a new Forest Code, policy reforms, integration of afforestation plans into some form of emissions trading system, and national capacity development. In this context, a complementary PBL in the energy sector, co-financed by AFD and the EU, was mentioned. Links to agricultural production, for example honey production, were discussed in conjunction with support for agroforestry development. The governance structure of PBL implementation was explained. Challenges include funding allocation to the Ministry of Environment, institutional resistance, and coordination with other ministries as forestry management cannot be improved in isolation, as well as mobilising all partners interested in forestry and maintaining their cohesion and coordination.

Adrian Enache, Senior Engineer, Projects Directorate, Environment & Natural Resources, Bio-economy Division, European Investment Bank provided insights into the **additionality and impact facilitated by the EIB in sustainable forestry sector investments**. He highlighted the importance of environmental and social sustainability systems in all financed projects. In the primary forestry sector, EIB focuses on sustainable forest resource management, financing forest protection and restoration measures, biodiversity conservation, and increasing nature-based solutions and ecosystem services, including carbon credits. The bank supports both private and public sectors, co-financing national afforestation programs within the EU, aligned with EU Biodiversity Strategy targets. Potential counterparts for EIB financing include ministries, environmental agencies, SMEs, corporations, and private equity funds dedicated to the forestry sector. EIB showcased two projects: (1) In Romania, an investment program funded by EIB with €9.5 million aimed at improving forest management and biodiversity conservation, resulting in GHG emissions reduction and biodiversity protection; (2) In Morocco, the EIB and EU co-funded project with €100 million supports forest rehabilitation, water conservation, and biodiversity promotion, contributing to GHG emissions reduction and afforestation. EIB reiterated its commitment to financing forest-based bioeconomy, Climate Action, and Environmental Sustainability, with the Invest EU Advisory Hub providing support for project developers.

During the discussion, participants exchanged insights on innovative investment schemes involving local businesses, particularly in the forestry sector:

- **AFD's Perspective:** In Moldova, the implementation of the new Forest Code and specific milestones create opportunities for private sector actors to invest in forestry. The focus is on removing barriers rather than providing incentives.
- **EIB's Approach:** EIB utilizes intermediate financial instruments, channelling financing through commercial banks while ensuring adherence to environmental and social



standards. The innovation lies in involving local communities from the project's inception, benefiting them through traditional types of loans.

- **Policy-Based Lending Evaluation:** The discussion touched upon the challenge of measuring the success of policy actions and their impact on the ground. AFD highlighted the dual-level approach to monitoring and evaluation in Development Policy Loans (DPLs): an accountant level for progress assessment and the development of a dashboard for modernizing the forestry sector.
- **World Bank's Practical Experience:** The World Bank shared practical experiences with local financing instruments. A \$650 million forest investment program was referenced, with some projects implemented by the IFC. Examples included guarantees for local banking and micro-finance for forest-based products, showcasing successful initiatives and ongoing evaluations of various financial instruments.

#### **Item 4. Advancing the Emerald Network and Natura2000**

Angela Bularga, Programme Manager, European Commission set the scene for discussions under this item of the agenda, having emphasized the importance and interconnectedness of Natura2000 and the Emerald Network.

Marc Hory from the Standing Committee to the **Bern Convention, Council of Europe**, presented the Emerald Network's constitution process and achievements at the pan-European level. He outlined the purpose of the Emerald Network, emphasizing its role in conserving European species and habitats, and explained the criteria for selecting Emerald sites. Mr. Hory discussed the three main phases of the Emerald Network constitution: creating a database, evaluation process, and designation. He provided an overview of the current state of the Emerald Network, with a specific focus on the EaP countries. Additionally, he detailed the performance indicators used to measure contracting parties' progress across different phases of the process, highlighting indicators for national coverage, site adoption, sufficiency, and management plan implementation. The presentation provided valuable insights into the Emerald constitution process and its significance for biodiversity conservation in Europe.

Marc Roekaerts, Senior Biodiversity Expert at the World Bank, delivered a presentation titled "Advancing Biodiversity Conservation in EaP Countries: Overcoming Challenges and Taking Further Actions." He provided an insightful overview of the history of the Emerald Network in EaP countries, highlighting pilot projects dating back to 2001 in Ukraine and subsequent initiatives in other countries. Mr. Roekaerts offered a **brief update on the status of EaP countries regarding the Emerald Network**, noting progress across all countries in Phase 1, with varying Sufficiency Index percentages. He discussed the implementation challenges associated with different phases of the Emerald Network establishment and emphasized the importance of creating a Roadmap to guide progress. Mr. Roekaerts outlined key steps for developing the Roadmap, including time-bound targets tailored to each country's realities, following the Emerald Network Barometer indexes, defining responsibilities, and ensuring proper funding. Additionally, he suggested specific actions for each phase of the Emerald Network establishment, such as data availability and database updates for Phase 1, organization of biogeographical seminars for Phase 2, and the adoption of management plans for Phase 3, alongside developing a legal framework and stakeholder engagement.

Iva Obretenova, representing DG Environment at the European Commission, delivered a presentation on "**Transitioning from the Emerald Network to Natura 2000 - Advice for a Successful Process.**" She outlined the legal process of Natura 2000 adoption since 1992, noting improvements in site identification and legal designation, establishment of conservation objectives, and clarifications from the European Court of Justice. Ms. Obretenova highlighted the coverage of Natura 2000 for various species and habitats, identifying deficiencies and challenges in setup stages. Solutions included financial support, infringement procedures, guidance documents, and scientific working groups. Emphasizing the balance between conservation and sustainable use, Ms. Obretenova underscored four key points for Natura 2000 protection and management. She discussed current and future challenges, such as environmental pressures, land use intensification, rural abandonment, and climate change. Regarding the transition from Emerald to Natura 2000 during EU accession, Ms. Obretenova emphasized the need for management, enforcement, and monitoring capacity, sufficiency evaluation, and submission timelines.

David Lacina, Director of the Department of Territorial Protection at the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic, provided an overview of the **upcoming LIFE project in Ukraine**. The LIFE project, titled "Conservation of Natural Heritage for Life in Ukraine," is set to commence in March 2024. It is a collaborative effort between the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic (as the lead partner and coordinator), Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group, Environment-People-Law, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine. The project aims to establish a common legislative space for Ukraine and the EU for nature protection, implementing a modern European model of governance and management for nature protection in Ukraine. Additionally, it will promote the Natura 2000 network in Ukraine, moving from knowledge to application, with a focus on sustainability, replication, and exploitation of project results. Specific activities under the project include legal establishment of the Emerald network, its transformation to the Natura 2000 network, adjustment of species protection both legally and practically, and ensuring effective monitoring, reporting, and data management systems are in place.

The participants highlighted significant progress made by the countries in establishing the Emerald network during the discussion. They emphasized that committed individuals advocating for change and the active involvement of stakeholders are key factors contributing to the success of the process.

## **Item 5. EU Deforestation Regulation**

Helge Elisabeth Zeitler, Deputy Head of Unit at the Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission, spoke about the significance of the **new EU Deforestation Regulation** (EUDR, 2023) and its implications for EaP countries. The presentation outlined the operation of the regulation, emphasizing mandatory due diligence for all operators involved in placing relevant products on the EU market or exporting them. It stressed the requirement for products to be both deforestation-free and legal, aligning with internationally recognized definitions and obligations applicable to operators and non-SME traders. The regulation encompasses commodities such as palm oil, soy, wood, and others, selected based on scientific data and EU impact. Notably, it applies to both domestically produced and imported products, with a 'Cut-off date' of December 31, 2020, aligned with UNSDG 15.2 to minimize disruption for smallholders. The focus is currently on effective implementation, including clarifying operational questions, developing guidance documents, setting up IT systems, and enhancing support tools for producer countries.

Cooperation with third countries involves engagement with major consumer nations, political dialogue, technical assistance, and outreach projects to enhance understanding and address challenges. Additionally, collaboration with deforestation multi-stakeholder platforms and sharing best practices are key components of the EU's approach.

Johannes Zahnen, Senior Advisor Forest Policy at WWF Germany, shared **insights on best practices from EU countries in combatting illegal logging**. He emphasized the magnitude of illegal logging and deforestation, with the EU being the second-largest importer responsible for 16% of deforestation associated with international trade in 2017. Mr. Zahnen highlighted the prevalence of environmental crime, which has become the third biggest sector of organized crime globally. He identified commodities such as soy, palm oil, and beef as major contributors to embedded tropical deforestation imported into the EU. Despite the European Timber Regulation (EUTR) coming into force in 2013, Mr. Zahnen pointed out challenges in its implementation, including unequal enforcement among EU member states and minimal fines. He outlined key improvements in the new regulation, such as an extended list of regulated products, inclusion of deforestation-free criteria, and due diligence requirements including geo-location of origin. These enhancements are expected to address previous shortcomings and establish a more effective framework for combating illegal logging.

Fisseha Tessema Abissa stressed the necessity of assessing the potential impact of the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) on the EaP countries, noting that this analysis will be integrated into EU4Environment activities.

#### **Item 6. Future Activities and Achieving Sustainability of EU4Environment Results**

Oksana Kovalenko, the EU4Environment Coordinator at the World Bank, explained that there were delays with the Result 4 implementation due to COVID pandemic and the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Consequently, the World Bank has initiated discussions about a contract extension. Ms Kovalenko stressed that despite challenges, planned activities are progressing, and there is flexibility to incorporate additional initiatives. The World Bank team will scrutinize additional activities against two criteria: their impact, especially as concerns regulatory reforms, and capacity for replication or upscaling. Emphasizing the importance of enhanced communication and visibility of outcomes, the team intends to deepen engagement with national counterparts. Internal discussions and stakeholder engagement will continue in order to refine activities and ensure their benefits and scalability.

Angela Bularga explained that due to budgetary planning across several years Result 4 was scheduled to start later than other EU4Environment components. She acknowledged the delays in the implementation of Result 4 and confirmed that there is an ongoing discussion regarding a contract extension. Ms. Bularga noted that a Result Oriented Monitoring (ROM) analysis, conducted in 2022, revealed continuous demand from the EaP countries for support in this area. At the same time, Ms. Bularga stressed the need for a sound justification for the extension, which is granted on an exceptional rather than automatic basis. The speaker mentioned the need to carefully consider support in other areas, especially as concerns climate policies where a new program EU4ClimateResilience was launched in 2024. Duplication with such programs should be carefully avoided and synergies fully ensured. Ms. Bularga emphasized the importance of maintaining its current scope while exploring complementary avenues for climate-related work relevant for the forestry sector. She underscored the need to actively involve local communities to foster job creation, income generation, and environmental interactions. Based on the ROM

recommendations, Ms. Bularga urged the implementing partner and the EaP countries to develop more specific and gender-friendly work plans, with clear indicators and targets. Regarding communication, she stressed the importance of aligning with updated EU guidance that requires a more strategic communication focused on results and benefits for people and the environment, beyond activity reporting.

## **Item 7. Wrap up and closure of Day 1**

In her closing remarks, highlighting the program's unique regional focus on forestry and biodiversity, Ms. Bularga expressed gratitude to the partner countries and the World Bank team, hoping for expedited progress in implementation.

Closing the meeting the Minister of Environment of Moldova expressed appreciation for the technical discussions and emphasized the importance of understanding conservation roles and uniting efforts. She expressed hope for Ukraine's green recovery post-war, citing the significance of discussions around the EU Deforestation Regulation and expressing gratitude for partner recommendations and regulatory insights. She acknowledged the challenges ahead but stressed the comprehensive approach and collaboration necessary for success, thanking participants and the European Commission for their contributions and insights.

## **DAY 2**

During Day 2 the Ministry of Environment, in collaboration with a wide range of national stakeholders, as well as representatives from the World Bank and the European Commission, convened to discuss the findings and recommendations of the study on "Identification of High Conservation Value Forests in the Republic of Moldova", developed by the World Bank under the EU4Environment program. The study identifies approximately 175,500 hectares of such forests, which represent nearly half of the country's total forested area. Additionally, the study provides technical and policy recommendations, such as improving the High Conservation Value (HCV) Forests identification guide, conducting further research, amending laws on protected areas, and developing an adaptive forest management to ensure future ecosystem services.

During the meeting, the importance of identifying HCV Forests for sustainable forest management was emphasized. HCV assessments aim to safeguard areas with exceptional environmental, social, and cultural values while balancing conservation and local community well-being. The discussion underscored the need for Moldova to adopt EU policy targets and sustainable forest management practices alongside improved management of various ecological aspects. Furthermore, the meeting highlighted the diverse benefits provided by forests, including livelihood support for local communities and biodiversity conservation. It was noted that the study's findings would support sustainable forest management and attract international investments to Moldova's forestry sector.

The event was followed by a field trip to Nature Reserve Codrii. The trip provided an opportunity for stakeholders to gain practical, hands-on experience and learn more about ecosystems conservation. This visit included the presentation of the protected area and discussed such topics as afforestation and ecological reconstruction in natural forests. The visit to the Local Nature Museum offered to the participants a display of thematic exhibits highlighting native species and habitats, with the aim of promoting environmental awareness.