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## **Summary report**

**Regional workshop on enhancing biodiversity protection in the Eastern Partnership countries:  
Learning from EU best practices**

**28-30 April 2025, Bratislava, Slovakia**

### **Summary of sessions**

#### **Day 1: Workshop sessions (28 April 2025)**

Opening remarks by Valts Vilnītis (ELLE), Gayane Minasyan (World Bank), Fisseha Tessema Abissa (World Bank), and Ľuboš Halada (ILE SAS) emphasized the workshop's goals and set the stage for collaboration and learning.

Key presentations included:

#### **National protected area systems in the new EU Member States (Valts Vilnītis, ELLE)**

The transition from post-Soviet systems to Natura 2000 in the Baltic and Central European states demonstrated significant progress in biodiversity conservation, driven primarily by the EU accession requirements. Key lessons highlighted the importance of robust legal frameworks, clear institutional responsibilities, and active stakeholder engagement. Challenges such as sectoral conflicts (forestry, infrastructure) and limited local stakeholder involvement initially complicated implementation. The presentation concluded that the EU-driven policy integration and sustained administrative capacity-building significantly improved protected area management outcomes.

#### **Road map to a functional protected area system (Jan Černecký, State Nature Conservancy, Slovakia)**

This presentation outlined a structured road map essential for effective protected area management, emphasizing alignment of national legislation with EU Directives, clear site delineation, site-specific conservation objectives, robust governance structures, sustainable funding, and systematic monitoring. A key takeaway was that successful implementation requires ongoing stakeholder participation, transparency, adaptive management, and integration of conservation objectives into broader sectoral policies.

#### **Conservation and management measures (Anete Pošiva-Bunkovska, ELLE)**

The presentation demonstrated diverse conservation approaches ranging from strict protection to active habitat management. Practical cases from Latvia, Germany, Czech Republic, Denmark, Spain, Italy, and Estonia showed that successful conservation is context-dependent and requires tailored, locally relevant measures. A central conclusion was the necessity of clearly defined conservation objectives and measurable, realistic management actions, supported by effective stakeholder collaboration and community involvement.

#### **Stakeholder roles in management (Gatis Eriņš, ELLE)**

Key conclusions emphasized that understanding and clearly defining the roles of various stakeholders – government agencies, landowners, NGOs, local communities, private businesses, and researchers – is fundamental to successful protected area management. Latvian case studies illustrated that early and inclusive stakeholder involvement helps prevent conflicts, builds trust, and promotes community-driven conservation approaches, ultimately leading to more sustainable biodiversity outcomes.

### **Contribution of protected areas to economy (Anete Pošiva-Bunkovska, ELLE)**

The presentation underscored the dual potential of protected areas to both restrict and stimulate local economies. Examples from Estonia, Latvia, Spain, Italy, and Switzerland illustrated successful integration of sustainable economic activities like ecotourism, traditional agriculture, and local product branding. The main takeaway was that conservation can be economically beneficial when adequately supported through subsidies, market access, and community involvement, ultimately leading to broader social and environmental sustainability.

### **Forest management in Natura 2000 areas (Gatis Eriņš, ELLE)**

Forest management within protected areas emerged as a significant source of potential conflict due to diverging stakeholder interests. The analysis of regulatory versus voluntary conservation mechanisms concluded that voluntary approaches, though more complex administratively, foster higher stakeholder motivation and cooperation, thus reducing conflict potential. Crucially, understanding historical management practices and local economic contexts is essential for developing effective, acceptable, and sustainable forest conservation strategies.



### **Day 2: Field trip (29 April 2025)**

Participants visited various Natura 2000 sites:

- Devínska Kobyla (xerothermic biotopes, traditional grazing, sustainable tourism)
- Devínske rameno (river restoration project)
- Devínska hradná skala (geological and botanical significance)
- Rudava river (river restoration from channelized to natural meandering channel)

Participants had the opportunity to directly observe practical management strategies and implemented conservation measures, and discuss on-site challenges and solutions. The field trip guides – conservation practitioners from BROZ NGO (Slovakia) – highlighted the importance of the proper site management with clear identification of values, targets, and measures, stakeholder engagement, information and knowledge collection and sharing, involvement of experts and cooperation with universities, researchers, planners, and designers, proper time and funding allocation.



### Day 3: Workshop sessions and discussions (30 April 2025)

The final day featured a recap by Ľuboš Halada and Valts Vilnītis, highlighting key learnings from the field trip.

Discussion on sustainable tourism emphasized balancing economic benefits with ecological preservation. The interactive session "The rockstars of protected area management" facilitated knowledge exchange through presentations from country teams on successful national practices.

#### Armenia: Good Practices in Protected Area Management

Armenia presented examples of successful management from Sevan National Park, Khor Virap Sanctuary, and Khosrov Forest Reserve. Key takeaways included the value of zoning systems to regulate human impact, extensive water quality and resource management, habitat restoration, and sustainable tourism development. Particularly notable was the Khosrov Forest Reserve's international recognition through the European Diploma of Protected Areas, affirming the effectiveness of its conservation and restoration measures following disturbances like wildfires. Continuous monitoring, international collaboration, and targeted ecological regeneration projects were identified as essential practices ensuring long-term sustainability.

#### Georgia: Management of Protected Areas

Discussions highlighted Georgia's efforts in managing various protected areas, including Kazbegi and Pshav-Khevsureti National Parks, Tusheti Protected Landscape, and Martvili Natural Monument. Key takeaways emphasized the importance of balancing conservation objectives with sustainable tourism and local community involvement. Effective management strategies involve zoning for different levels of protection and use, promoting sustainable visitor infrastructure, and actively engaging local communities and stakeholders in decision-making and conservation activities.

### **Moldova: Sustainable Management Practices**

The Moldovan team shared experiences and practices from protected areas like “Orhei” National Park, “Lower Prut” Natural Reserve, and “Plaiul Fagului” Scientific Reserve. Discussions emphasized the successful integration of biodiversity conservation with sustainable tourism and community engagement. Key conclusions included the importance of clearly delineating protected area boundaries, systematic biodiversity monitoring, invasive species control, and habitat restoration activities. Moreover, sustainable tourism infrastructure development and active involvement of local communities through Local Action Groups (LAGs) were highlighted as crucial factors for effective protected area management.

### **Ukraine: Emerald Network and Management Amidst Conflict**

Ukraine’s presentation highlighted the impacts of the ongoing war on protected areas, with significant threats to biodiversity in areas under conflict. The management of Pyriatynskyi National Nature Park was detailed, emphasizing robust conservation strategies, including the restoration of natural ecosystems, forest management guidelines focusing on biodiversity conservation, carbon storage, and preservation of old-growth and deadwood habitats. The Ukrainian experience underscored the necessity of resilience in conservation management during crises, advocating for thorough scientific assessment, invasive species control, and sustained community involvement to protect biodiversity effectively even under challenging conditions.

### **What’s new in the EU policies? (Luboš Halada, ILE SAS):**

This presentation highlighted recent policy developments, notably the European Green Deal, EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, and Nature Restoration Regulation. These policies set ambitious, legally binding targets for biodiversity recovery, climate neutrality, and ecosystem restoration. A critical conclusion was the urgent need for member states to align national strategies and policies with these EU directives, ensuring comprehensive and measurable actions to address biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, and climate change.



### **Key takeaways and recommendations:**

- Effective stakeholder engagement and clear governance structures are essential.
- Conservation strategies should balance ecological, economic, and social considerations.
- Continuous capacity-building and knowledge exchange are necessary for long-term success.

### **Recommendations for future actions:**

- Foster deeper integration of EU conservation models adapted to local contexts in EaP countries.

- Enhance inter-sectoral coordination and stakeholder involvement in planning and implementing biodiversity conservation measures.
- Ensure sustained financial and administrative support for conservation initiatives.