Committee for the activities of the Council of Europe
in the field of biological and landscape diversity
(CO-DBP)

Working Group on the Geological Heritage

1st meeting
13 September 2002 at 9.30 am
Room 14, Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg

REPORT OF THE MEETING

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the Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage

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1. Opening of the meeting by the Secretariat

Mr. Eladio Fernández-Galiano, Head of the Natural Heritage Division, welcomed the participants (see Appendix 1) and explained how the initiative to deal with the conservation of geological heritage originated.

Further to the proposal in 1963 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Organisation started its activities on nature conservation. Since then the following main initiatives have been launched:

- the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, which aimed to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats through intergovernmental co-operation. The Convention had 45 Contracting Parties, including some non-member States of the Council of Europe;
- the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest had the objectives of harmonising the policies on protected areas and helping accession states to adapt ecological networks to EU requirements;
- the European Diploma of Protected Areas which could be awarded to adequately protected natural or semi-natural areas of exceptional European interest from the point of view of conservation of biological, geological or landscape diversity;
- the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS), approved by the Ministers of Environment in Sofia in 1995, which aimed at protecting biological and landscape diversity in the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity;
- the Committee for the activities of the Council of Europe in the field of biological and landscape diversity (CO-DBP);
- the European Landscape Convention, opened for signature on 20 October 2000 in Florence, signed by 23 States, and, for the time being, ratified by three States;
- the Naturopa Information and Documentation Centre on Nature Conservation set up on 1967, dealing with public education, information and awareness.

In the framework of the Bern Convention, only the Recommendation No.36 (1992) on the conservation of underground habitats dealt with the topic concerned. Some States interested in the setting-up of the Emerald Network had expressed the wish to include also geological sites in the areas of special conservation interest. However, the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention had not considered it appropriate to enlarge the Emerald Network with sites of geological interest. Therefore, the Secretariat had presented the idea of dealing with the geological conservation to the members of CO-DBP, which had agreed to create this Working Group. The report of this meeting would be submitted to the next CO-DBP meeting to decide on future action.

2. Election of the Chair

Mr Jón Gunnar Ottoson (Iceland) was elected Chair of the Working Group.

3. Adoption of the Draft Agenda
   (document CO-DBP/GEO (2002) 1)

The Agenda was adopted as it appears in Appendix 2.

4. Presentation of existing initiatives for the conservation of geological heritage
   (document CO-DBP/GEO (2002) 2)

Also on behalf of the co-author Mr Helgi Torfason, Mr Tony Weighell presented the report on “Geological and geomorphological conservation: a review of global, European and national programmes”. In concluding his presentation and as the UK representative, he emphasised the existence of many European initiatives for geological conservation and the necessity to support them, avoiding the creation of new instruments. He also stressed the importance of working with Geosites and ProGeo and he regretted the absence of their representatives at the meeting.
Dr M Rössler, representing UNESCO, pointed out that in the World Heritage Convention, the UNESCO European Unit included the participation of Canada and USA. Since these two countries had an observer status within the Council of Europe, they should have also been invited to this meeting. She also informed the Group that the World Heritage Convention adopted a Global Strategy, which included studies on geological and fossil sites and expert meetings held in co-operation with IUGS. Concerning other programmes to enhance geological heritage conservation by the Division of Earth Sciences at UNESCO, she informed the meeting that UNESCO’s Executive Board decided not to pursue the development of a new Geoparks programme. UNESCO supported national initiatives for Geoparks and the network already comprised 12 Geoparks. Dr Rössler highlighted the following specific points from the World Heritage Fossil Sites Workshop (Sydney, 22 September–1 October 2002): the meeting focused on issues peculiar to the management of fossil sites, in particular the need of ongoing research to maintain and enhance World Heritage values, interpreting and communicating the significance and sites, managing tourism and protecting the World Heritage values of the site in the interests of all diverse stakeholders and interests. She also suggested co-operating with the Division of Ecological Sciences, which dealt with the Man and Biosphere programme, because the Biosphere Reserves were also concerned with the conservation of geological values with Biosphere Reserves.

In order to get a better idea of the initiatives carried out at national level, the Chair asked the participants to briefly present their national programmes and to send a short descriptive paragraph to the Secretariat to be integrated in the report. The Secretariat drew the attention of the participants to the written comments sent by Mr G Nechay from Hungary.

Dr W Janoschek, representative of IUGS, stated that IUGS was a non-profit making, non-governmental, scientific union. It had 150 member countries and 40 affiliate members and it was a full member of the International Council of Sciences (ICSU). It had close co-operation with UNESCO in worldwide geo-scientific activities. IUGS understood "geological sciences" as an umbrella for all earth sciences, including palaeontology and mineralogy. In respect of protection and conservation of geological sites, it created a Task Group on Geosites, chaired by Bill Wimbledon, in 1996. IUGS felt a necessity to enhance the information of the public (public awareness) and was promoting an International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE) together with other unions, ICSU, UNESCO and UN. Dr Janoschek also provided informal information about Austria. A special programme on geological sites protection existed, but it was possible under different legal regulations to protect sites or landscapes:

- Naturdenkmal (nature monument): many biological sites, basically all caves and few geological, palaeontological and mineralogical sites;
- Natutpark, Landschaftspark (Nature Park);
- Nationalpark (National Park): Federal law;
- World Heritage of UNESCO;
- GEOPARKS (two regions adopted in Austria).

The Geological Survey of Austria was completing a list of geological important sites in Austria (Gaya's Sterne – Stars of Gaya). Not necessarily all these sites should be protected geosites.

Professor J-C Gall, representative of the European Palaeontological Association, underlined that for many people, ambiguity exists when the geological heritage was discussed: should fossiliferous deposits be included? Perhaps it would be better to use the term geological and palaeontological heritage.

Mr H Torfason, from Iceland, stated that several sites of geological importance in Iceland were already protected by the law on nature protection. Some of these were protected mainly because of the geology, palaeontology or geomorphology. This included nature monuments and nature conservation areas. Others were protected as parts of the landscape in national parks and nature conservation areas. Furthermore, some geological phenomena were protected in a general way, such as waterfalls, geothermal springs and their deposits, volcanic landforms and cave formations. Planning and development of such areas required consultation with the Nature Conservation Agency. These sites of geological importance which received protection, were not selected systematically. Presently, however, a process was underway identifying sites, based on set criteria, that may need protection and preparing a database to evaluate and select new sites and monuments to be protected. He stressed that a GIS system was the best tool that could be used nowadays.
Mr B Kucera, Czech Republic, informed the Group that the Law No. 114/1992 on Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection gave full possibility for the conservation of geological sites, with the help of:

- **special protected areas** – especially nature monuments and national nature monuments, but also other categories for complete protection of nature reserves, national nature reserves, protected landscape areas and national parks;
- **general nature conservation** – sites could be registered as an important landscape element, all caves must be protected and there was a special paragraph for protection of palaeontological finds;
- **complementary protection** – with the help of paragraphs for protection of landscape character and in natural parks, declared by districts.

Up to now evaluation of geological sites (from the database of the Geological Service of the Czech Republic) with the use of all possibilities given by the law for their protection. For the process of that evaluation a special methodology was prepared first.

Mr T Weighell, representative of United Kingdom, stated that his country recognised over 3000 geological and geomorphological sites through a “Geological Conservation Review” in England, Scotland and Wales with a parallel exercise in Northern Ireland. Protection of these sites was through legislation that also protects wildlife. With the selection of sites virtually complete, the UK effort was now focussed on developing site management strategies to conserve and enhance sites. Programmes were being developed to integrate geological conservation into wider landscape conservation.

Ms D Ozola, representative of Latvia, pointed out that the current law on "Specially Protected Nature Territories" (1993, amendments 1997, 2002) protected the geological and geomorphologic heritage. There were seven categories of protected territories specified in the law. The geological and geomorphologic heritage was protected under the category "Nature monuments". Some geomorphologic forms were protected as "Nature reserves". According to the law, "Nature monuments were separate, isolated natural formations: geological and geomorphologic nature monuments and other natural rarities having scientific, cultural and historical, aesthetic or ecological value". In April 2001, the Government approved the list of 206 protected geological and geomorphologic monuments, including different rock outcrops, groundwater and mineral water sources, large boulders, and typical or rare relief forms. The Latvian Environmental Agency held the database of geological and geomorphologic nature monuments as a part of the whole database of Specially Protected Nature Territories. The National Programme on Biological Diversity was approved by the Government in 2000. One of the issues in the Programme was the conservation of mires, rock outcrops, caves and karst-holes.

Mr P Cabrol, representative of France, said that the protection of French geological sites was ensured by several legal measures.

All the palaeontology of the Quaternary era was totally protected by the laws of 1941 and 1980. The protection of the geological heritage was enabled by the law on natural monuments and sites (1930), which took in account all landscape and geomorphological aspects, rivers, lakes, glaciers and grottos.

The law of 1976 protected the entire geological heritage and introduced the notion of management of this heritage.

The articles of the latest law of February 1995 foresaw the protection of geological sites (minerals, fossils). This was the reason behind the creation by the Ministry of Environment of the Standing Conference of the Geological Heritage (Conférence Permanente du Patrimoine Géologique – CPPG), which brought together the partners involved. The role of the CPPG was to advise the Ministry on all problems relating to protection, management and valorisation of this heritage.

The initial work carried out within the framework of the CPPG's activities was the inventory of the geological heritage; the Minister of the Environment mandated the BRGM to conceive a database for a pilot region – Brittany. The results of this test phase would be given in Brest on 27 September 2002 before it was extended to the whole territory in 2003.

Mr J Schenker, representative of Switzerland, stated that national conservation legislation provided the basis for inventories, with corresponding decrees fixing conservation objectives for listed sites. At present there
was no inventory of designated geological sites. Nevertheless, different inventories contained geological objects, especially the Federal Inventory of Landscapes and National Monuments of National Importance and the Federal Inventory of Floodplains of National Importance, with 55 glacier forelands and 15 alpine alluvial plains. Moreover, the Swiss Landscape Concept mentioned as one measure to establish the scientific and legal base for the protection of geotopes. A first step was the realisation of an inventory of geotopes of national significance by a Working Group for the Protection of Geotopes in Switzerland of the Swiss Academy of Sciences. This inventory must be considered as an informal catalogue which serves as a first basis for the discussion of new legal measures.

The representative of UNESCO pointed out that geological heritage conservation was not very well represented in the World Heritage List. For this reason regional initiatives were encouraged and for example three meetings concerning the Alpine region were organised in 2000 and 2001 (Hallstatt, Austria, Turin, Italy and UNESCO Headquarters). The first natural World Heritage site from the Alps was inscribed in December 2001, the Jungfrau-Aletsch-Bietschhorn (Switzerland), which included geological values, and other sites, such as Monte San Giorgio, Switzerland, were in the nomination process. Furthermore, she announced that the next meeting of the European Geoparks Network would be held at the Kulturpark Kamptal in Austria from 24 to 27 October 2002. This meeting would be open to all members of the Network and to other interested people.

5. Discussion on the need for action at international level and possible role of the Council of Europe

The Secretariat underlined the importance to clarify if there is a need for action to protect geological sites or if the present situation was satisfactory. If there was a need of action, then we would have to see if the theme was of political interest to the Governments. The Secretariat suggested four possibilities of action:

1. To prepare a legal binding treaty for the protection of geological heritage. However, to launch this activity we would need political support from many States. Moreover, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe would not be much in favour because it believed that States were already overburdened with the compliance of many binding instruments and that we should concentrate our activities in monitoring the existing treaties.
2. To draft a Recommendation to the Committee of Ministers, which was not binding but had a moral commitment and had more freedom to request action from the States.
3. To prepare a programme of activity within Council of Europe’s work such as the PEBLDS and/or the European Landscape Convention. Concerning the latter activity it should be noted that 10 ratifications were needed for its entering into force and, so far, only 3 States had ratified out of 23 signatures. Therefore, it would take some time before being operative. On the contrary, PEBLDS was already operative with 55 States members of the Council of Europe and of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe;
4. To establish a partnership with existing Organisations, like ProGeo for instance. The Council of Europe provided political support, international contacts and offered an intergovernmental forum for discussing this interesting issue.

The representative of Iceland expressed his support for the development of a new legal binding treaty, because in this way the initiative could have more freedom without depending upon other Conventions and instruments.

The representative of the UK stressed his opposition to the development of a new instrument because he considered it not a practical objective and time-consuming. He supported the idea of a Recommendation to the Committee of Ministers because it represented the highest practical level of support.

The representative of IUGS suggested initiatives and activities which would contribute to the protection of geological interesting sites and landscapes. He proposed using existing entities, especially ProGeo and Geosites. Probably some money, coming from the Council of Europe, would be necessary to convene coming meetings and to start activities. He also suggested using the tool of Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to address the member countries. It would reach basically politicians, diplomats and civil servants of Ministries. IUGS offered its network to inform the geo-scientific community of the member countries.
Concerning geological sites, the representative of the European Palaeontological Association pointed out that two categories should be distinguished:

1. remarkable geological outcrops structures: quarries, cliffs, rifts, etc. These sites risked degradation but not pillage; simple protection measures were generally sufficient;
2. geological and palaeontological objects: fossils and minerals which were often subject to organised pillage or illegal trafficking; measures to control and limit their commercialisation were necessary.

He also informed the Group that the EPA had twice intervened to defend the geological heritage:
- in May 2002 at a meeting on the Florence Convention, on the initiative of the EPA an appendix was added to the text of the Convention concerning the geological history of landscapes, i.e. their dimension in time;
- in 1999, the EPA received the support of about 20 Council of Europe parliamentarians for a draft recommendation on the protection of the palaeontological and mineralogical heritage.

The representative of the Czech Republic suggested involving the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy and the European Landscape Convention.

The representative of the UK emphasised the important role that the Council of Europe could take in bringing all the European initiatives together and developing international co-operation on these issues. He was not in favour of using the Bern Convention and the Emerald Network, as frameworks for the conservation of geosites, because of political implications. For the site approach, he suggested working with IUGS and ProGeo. The Council of Europe should support such existing and active initiatives. As far as the landscape approach was concerned, co-operation with the European Landscape Convention should start as soon as possible.

The representative of France supported the idea of having a Recommendation with an action plan for the future activities, which would help in keeping the Recommendation alive. This action plan should be coherent with the UNESCO’s activity and contribute to the World Heritage List.

The UNESCO representative supported the idea of the Council of Europe’s action in co-operation with existing instruments and initiatives. The World Heritage Convention contributed to the in situ protection. Since the management of the sites was of paramount importance and since there was a need for a World Heritage monitoring, she suggested the preparation of a Code of Conduct.

The Secretariat informed the Group on the procedure to be followed after this meeting. The report of the meeting would be submitted on 25 October 2002 to the Bureau of the CO-DBP and the Secretariat would ask for instruction on the possibility of drafting a Recommendation in the future. If the CO-DBP was in favour of such an initiative, a draft Recommendation could be prepared in co-operation with UNESCO and Geosites-ProGeo, and circulated by email to the members of the Group, in order to gather their comments before the next meeting, which could be jointly organised with UNESCO. The Secretariat asked the participants to suggest elements for the preparation of the Recommendation.

The representative of IUGS stressed that there was no need to mention the necessity of a compilation of inventories because Geosites and ProGeo were already working very well on this issue. However, France underlined the need to homogenise inventories at pan-European level.

The representative of the European Palaeontological Association suggested dealing with the problem of illegal trafficking of minerals and fossils and the necessity of controlling it.

The representative of UNESCO emphasised the importance of mentioning the co-operation with the cultural heritage sector, because it was involved in the protection of the mining and industrial sites (e.g. Goslar-Rammelsberg, Germany; Las Medulas, Spain), as well as the need of guidelines for the management of palaeontological and geological sites. The representative of France added that local authorities must be involved in the management of sites.

The representative of UK suggested the following items for the recommendation:
1. to recognise the inventory process of Geosites-ProGeo as well as the national programmes;
2. to encourage national legislations in recognising geological sites for protection;
3. to foster education and awareness-raising;
4. to encourage the sustainable development approach;
5. to integrate the conservation of geological heritage in other programmes (European Landscape Convention, PEBLDS, etc);
6. to emphasise the importance of the management of geological sites;
7. to seek possibilities for the management of geological objects collected and to eliminate their illegal trafficking.

The representative of IUGS asked what could be the benefit of the Council of Europe’s geological heritage initiative to the concerned people working in the field. The Secretariat recalled that the Organisation was set up to work towards the union of countries and to have the harmonisation of Europe. Through the international co-operation activities, countries were learning a lot and bilateral co-operation was also stimulated. If a common approach for geological conservation was launched, countries that were not yet involved in such initiatives might be also stimulated.

Conclusions:

There was consensus in reporting the results of discussions to the Bureau of the CO-DBP and the CO-DBP itself, in view of the preparation of a draft Recommendation on "Conservation of the geological heritage and areas of special geological interest", for possible adoption by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Such a task could be a co-operation exercise with UNESCO and relevant NGOs and scientific bodies, such as ProGeo, Geosites, the International Union of Geological Sciences, the European Federation of Geologists and the European Palaeontological Association. A partnership of the Council of Europe with UNESCO and the organisations mentioned above might be able to develop a framework of common activities at the European level aimed at the protection, management and enhancement of mobile geological heritage and of areas of special geological interest in Europe.

6. Date and place of the next meeting of the Working Group

The date and place of the next meeting of the Working Group would be decided after the CO-DBP’s meeting on 29 January 2003.

7. Other business

No other business was raised.
APPENDIX 1

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APPENDIX 2

AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting by the Secretariat
2. Election of the Chair
3. Adoption of the Draft Agenda
   (document CO-DBP/GEO (2002) 1)
4. Presentation of existing initiatives for the conservation of geological heritage
   (document CO-DBP/GEO (2002) 2)
5. Discussion on the need for action at international level and possible role of the Council of Europe
6. Date and place of the next meeting of the Working Group
7. Other business