Treasures for the new Europe
Challenges and Opportunities

The process of accession to the European Union is already proving to address many of the most serious environmental problems inherited from the past, but the EC's vast expansion is an extension or accelerating new threats, involving intensive agriculture practices, aggravate impacts of development, and waste considerable threats that have already started to increase in areas that are also under pressure in waste and other areas in the region. At the same time, the candidate countries have to change many of the measures and standards that currently determine national and, benefit from their rich natural heritage.

An environmental enlargement

Never before have new enlargements of the European Union, but this one is far the most ambitious, aiming at as many as 100 new members. Only nine new countries have already joined the European Union. An additional environmental enlargement, the present enlargement at unprecedented scale and speed, the candidate countries and new members will either to look at and taking into consideration natural resources as well as new and expanding environmental standards, but also preserving the natural wealth that these countries bring to the new EU.

An a sustainable future

Sustainable Development Strategy Challenge

Though EU environmental legislation and standards are in most cases stricter than those in the candidate countries to date, current programmes and patterns of economic growth that will accompany accession are likely to lead to the erosion of the protected natural wealth that these countries contain. Therefore, integrated national strategies on sustainability and international co-operation are crucial.

The ongoing historic enlargement of the European Union is the greatest test of our commitment to achieving sustainable development – a commitment formally anchored in the Amsterdam Treaty of the European Union. The EU has begun elaborating a Biodiversity Development Strategy, including integration of environmental concerns into all areas of activity, from transportation to agriculture and industry. Fully applied, this approach could not only remove many of the current threats posed by EU policies and programmes, but also put the candidate countries on a new development path – a new path based on the “compatible advantage” of their rich natural and cultural heritage and the hopes of the existing member states.

The enlarged future for the new European Union

The future of the candidate countries is closely bound to that of existing EU member states. Any achievements now being made in addressing past environmental problems in the candidate countries will be supplemented by those of the European Union as a whole. The European Union does not manage to become more environmentally sensitive and sustainable. This will require not only far-reaching reforms and the promotion of innovative policies and programmes, but also, more importantly, efforts by us to assure a sustainable future.

Living environments Agriculture and Rural Development

Centres of human culture have produced diverse and rich landscapes in the candidate countries. These landscapes are threatened by agricultural and rural development policies that still remain strong in intensive agricultural farming practices, emphasizing high inputs of energy and chemicals.

With significant reform, EU agriculture and rural development policies could do a great deal of good instead of harm by shifting the current support of intensive farming to promoting nature conservation, and from supporting mass production to encouraging sustainable development for local areas. Rural development programs such as the LEADER program, which requires the needs and conditions of rural communities, and age-related programmes supporting rural farming practices are particularly promising and should be promoted.

Nature preserved Natura 2000

Each of the candidate countries must be at the date of accession have nominated special natural areas, part of an EU-wide network of nature conservation areas. The so-called Natura 2000 network will provide strategic planning tools and instruments for drafting and supporting special natural areas. In the meantime, destruction from infrastructure projects can be limited by efficiently applying environmental impact and strategic environmental assessments to planned projects.

Natural treasures and environmental hotspots

Contrary to common perceptions, the bulk of Europe's natural heritage today lies in the Eastern and the Western part of the European Union. In comparison with Western European countries, where economic development took off with the Industrial Revolution, the slower pace of change that occurred in Central and Eastern Europe served to better preserve the natural heritage of the region. Half a century of Communist-era agricultural and industrial exploitation in the region. Concentrated development together with weak environmental standards produced environmental disaster areas like the infamous “Black Triangle” shared by the Czech Republic, Poland, and Germany, and current problems for example with air and water pollution. At the same time, however, nature reserves remained virtually untouched.

Trekking among one of Europe’s last wilderness areas: the Black Triangle, a central area of virgin forest and are the last stronghold for European populations of brown bear, wolf and Dalmatian pelican. © Andi Vorauer/WWF-Austria

WWF’s Accession Initiative

The Accession Initiative was launched by WWF in 2001 in response to the significant challenge posed by accession. The initiative builds on two years of experience of working with the Eastern and Central-Eastern Europe. The core components of the initiatives programmes are:

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Enlargement enriches the EU

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Eustein Haugen: Wildlife in a changing world (back cover)

The Dniester Delta, Ukraine: the largest wetland system in the world, providing breeding, resting and wintering grounds for more than 300 bird species, including the endangered Dalmatian pelican. © P. Popp & M. H. Wunderfitt

Water and flood management is one of the Water Framework Directive

The EU’s Water Framework Directive, which emphasizes ecological processes and public participation in water management, could have far-reaching impact if fully effectively implemented.

Opportunity

The cost of adopting EU environmental standards in the ten candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe is estimated by the European Commission to be 80-110 billion Euro, to be shared among the EU member states, the candidate countries, and private investors. The costs can be spread over periods of years, and the benefits of the development strategy could be: the benefits for public health and reduced damage to forests and water bodies in a congestion traffic and is projected to bring savings between 20% to 30% per cent.

Living waterways

Water Framework Directive

The weakness practices present not only constraints but also opportunities to solve many of these problems. Investment in the maintenance of water courses, and water and nature management, could have far-reaching impact if fully effectively implemented.

Models and Rostocks (Elbe) in Germany, the Rhine, and the Danube catchment area. The Rhine catchment area is one of the world’s largest river basins and is home to a rich variety of species of plants and animals. © Ralf Biggendorff

Saved or squandered?

The countries now lose to join the European Union bring with them a vast number of areas on the European continent. Reassessing these areas now that the European Union is expected to remain, but also critically dependent on changes made in the European Union and the market. © Andi Vorauer/WWF Austria

Treasuries for the new EU

The candidate countries are threatened by poorly planned development, which is accelerating as accession to the European Union draws near.

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Relatives protection of selected species in EU candidate countries and EU member states – approximate number of individuals

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