

# The role of IEB in the expert programme of the Hungarian EU presidency

KATALIN TÖRÖK<sup>1</sup>, director

## Abstract

A joint planning for the Hungarian EU presidency started already some years ago, based on the long collaboration between the official nature conservation authorities and the Institute of Ecology and Botany (IEB). The activities included support in the tasks related to the presidency and the organisation of joint meetings. Several colleagues from the Institute have been involved in the reviewing of expert documents. The presidency conference of the EPBRS (*European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy*) was organised with the Ministry of Rural Development. IEB even had a major role in the expert programme of the European Nature Directors Meeting. Both conferences are organized in the first half of 2011.

## Introduction

The tasks related to the conservation, management and reporting on nature for a European Union member state cannot be fully satisfied with the exclusive participation of the official nature conservation apparatus. IEB and its researcher staff have provided important expert background for several decades for the governments. This support included among others, the designation of national parks, the identification of listed species and habitats of the Pannonian eco-region, reporting obligations in relation to the NATURA 2000 network, the design and implementation of the biodiversity monitoring system. The daily, mutually beneficial relationship with the staff of nature conservation institutions and national parks has paved the road to our role in the organisation of the presidency. Brainstorming started already in the early planning phase (2008) on how to include the EPBRS meeting into the official programme of the presidency, as it was the tradition before, in order to ensure to a certain extent the financial background of the conference. Our ideas and priorities have been acknowledged, so ecosystem services and biological invasion became the topic of the meeting. The presidency was preceded by the review and preparation of a number of EU level documents where IEB had a significant role.

## Expert support

Several European programs and reports dealing with biodiversity were prepared in 2010, which have been reviewed and finalized by invited experts. IEB has been invited by the European Environment Agency to the consultation of the 2010 EU biodiversity status review (*EU 2010 Biodiversity Baseline Report*). This review not only assesses the status of biodiversity, but also suggests a plan of action. Our participation opened the opportunity to influence the biodiversity strategy of the EU until 2020. We acknowledge that the report is the work of qualified experts, and that by gaining access to the reports before publication, we also got an advantage in writing research applications. The report concludes that biodiversity is declining steadily, which is detrimental to the natural capital influencing human quality of life. Therefore, new, more stringent goals are set for a further period, the year 2020 marked as the halting of biodiversity loss and the restoration of at least 15% of the degraded areas.

---

<sup>1</sup> igazgato@botanika.hu

The other important line of work is the activity related to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). An important part of preparing for the meetings is the drafting of a single European standpoint. IEB experts had a voice in the drafting procedure, most expressed for the Hungarian EU presidency. The International Year of Biodiversity (2010<sup>2</sup>) was an important milestone in setting priorities. It is widely accepted that targets have not been met, since the loss of biodiversity has not been halted, neither at global nor at local level. Thus, further work to develop the goals will be a major task of the Parties of the Convention. IEB researchers also took part in reviewing the drafts on target setting.

Two of our researchers participated in the ad-hoc expert groups of the Convention as national experts, where the link between climate change and biodiversity, and biological invasions were the topics. Their professional support and suggestions improved the valuation of Hungarian contribution and raised the Institute's professional reputation. However, the participation required a significant work load, which does not appear directly in publications.

### **EPBRS Conference**

As a result of a long-term preparatory work by IEB, the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy convention became part of the official expert meetings of the Hungarian EU presidency. The supporting statement of the Biology Section of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences had a major part in this to happen. One of the two Presidency events of official nature conservancy was fully organized by IEB, and we had a significant role even in the other one. We determined the topic of the EPBRS Conference to be “*Research priorities to sustain ecosystem services*”. In cooperation with the international Steering Committee of EPBRS, we developed the program and invited plenary speakers. Along with the IEB staff, a department head of the Ministry of Rural Development was also involved in the Organising Committee.

The conference was held with governmental support at Stefánia Palace, in one of the official meeting venues of the Presidency. First, plenary speakers introduced the topic at the professional program, and then three working groups drafted research priorities. The Hungarian EPBRS meeting was the last, after 10 years to be organised along the regular arrangement. Therefore this meeting can be considered as a landmark. The Steering Committee discussed the future of EPBRS and the possible reorganisation of its activity for a full day during the meeting, further clarifying the role of EPBRS in the changed international environment.

### **Nature Conservation Directors Meeting**

The comments and suggestion of the experts of IEB have been included in the program of this meeting as well, organised by the Ministry of Rural Development. Along the traditions of the Presidency meetings, the national interests dominated the choice of topics. Thus, ecosystem services, wetlands and biological invasion were selected as main themes. A publication of a standpoint on these issues is foreseen; the role of IEB staff in the drafting is acknowledged. A plenary report will be provided about the results of the EPBRS conference, and in addition, a researcher from IEB will give an oral presentation on the topic of ethnoecology.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cbd.int/2010/welcome/>

The official organisers accepted our proposal to improve the science-policy interface by bringing the biodiversity-knowledge project into focus (biodiversity-knowledge network<sup>3</sup>). The theme also holds opportunity for decision makers to discuss issues of interest, to assess needs, and formulate questions at national and EU levels. This activity can serve the requirements of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES<sup>4</sup>), which is under development.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://biodiversityknowledge.eu/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ipbes.net/>