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10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference

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World Heritage Site

Wartburg, Eisenach
Germany



3rd session - panel discussion: The European Green Belt as Green Infrastructure: challenges, strategies and partnerships



Figure 1: Panel Discussion, © J.Buldmann/BUND

Participants (from left to right):

Prof. Dr. Joachim-Felix Leonhard, member of the German UNESCO Commission (DUK) and chair of the German National Committee of the UNESCO Memory of the World

Anja Siegesmund, Thuringian Minister of Environment, Energy and Nature Conservation

Martin Geilhufe, Landesbeauftragter of BUND Bavaria; Moderation

Stefan Leiner, Head of the Biodiversity Unit, DG Environment, European Commission

Gabriel Schwaderer, Executive Director of EuroNatur Foundation, chair of the European Green Belt Association

Main Statements of the Panel Discussion (summarized):

Anja Siegesmund

- Declaring the Green Belt in Thuringia a National Nature Monument would give opportunities to foster both memorial work and nature conservation; e.g. it would enable the government to fund local authorities to create conservation-infrastructure and tourism.
- Local authorities and their needs were involved in the process of working towards the declaration; it was essential to demonstrate how economic and ecological aspects can successfully be connected.
- Memory must not be allowed to fade. Today as new fences and walls are being discussed all over the world our memorial responsibility towards future generations becomes obvious. The European Green Belt shows that former death strips can be lifelines. Fulfilling these responsibilities is a “Herzensangelegenheit” [Ger.: “Matter of the heart”].
- The idea of an application for the nomination of the EGB as UNESCO World Heritage is good and should be pursued further. This can only be achieved as the outcome of the work of everyone dedicated to the EGB. Given the special character of the EGB, being World Heritage would strengthen its role as a symbol to preserve memory in the future.

Gabriel Schwaderer:

- Earmark-funding for Green Infrastructure (GI) in the EU budget and a general increase in funding for nature conservation and biodiversity would be very important. This would highlight the importance of biodiversity and make sure investments in GI are made. This is a joint responsibility of the EU-Parliament, the member states, the EU-Council and the EU-Commission.
- Installing a TEN-G concept (Trans-European Network for Green Infrastructure) unfortunately failed up to now. To copy the concept of grey infrastructure to connect Europe would have been an opportunity to have a number of outstanding examples for Trans-European biodiversity-networks.
- New fences being built along the former Iron Curtain is harmful to both nature and people.
- Usually societies decide in favour of infrastructure projects and against concerns of nature. EGB should be a space where decisions are usually taken with a reversed priority. Countries along the EGB should consider the EGB as a core area for ecological development.
- The EGB is a very convincing statement for European friendship and understanding.

Stefan Leiner:

- The idea of the EGB fits 100% to EU policies for GI, biodiversity and environment. The stories behind it - like concrete projects and successes and achievements and the idea of GI – it should be brought to a broader public and members of EU-Parliament.
- What would be needed to better support GI-Initiatives is a better incorporation of the environment in EU policies in general; currently environment is not included in the existing Priority Areas. Taking sustainable development goals as a basis for overall EU policies would lead to incorporation of GI into environment- but also transport-, regional development-, fishery- agriculture policies. GI needs to be more binding and accepted to solve incoherence of EU financing projects protecting as well as projects destroying nature.
- The concept of TEN-G is difficult to sell, as objective criteria need to be developed first.
- To have earmark-funds being established everyone has to work in his/her member-state, arguing that such funding is wanted.

Prof. Dr. Joachim-Felix Leonhard:

- Being responsible for the memory of the world means to also think about lost memories. Preserving memories for coming generations is a necessary duty.
- The declaration of the Thuringian part of the inner-German Green Belt as National Nature Monument is a pilot-action, as it is focussing on nature, education, science and culture. Something that is thought about in the UNESCO as well.
- UNESCO will be following the discussions and outcomes of this conference. The conference is a good place to think about a nomination as world heritage for the European Green Belt. Up to now already two former borders are world heritage sites: The Chinese Wall and the Limes. Both –as the European Green Belt – share the common thought of leaving the symbol for separation behind and be a bridge.
- A joint application of all 24 countries for the nomination would be an interesting approach.
- More exchange programmes for young people are needed for them to learn about cultures and nature. The Green Belt would be a good place for such programmes.

As a joint message, the participants of the conference adopted the "Eisenach Resolution on the European Green Belt". All decision-makers and actors from the European to the local level are called upon to support and implement the necessary measures for the conservation and development of the Green Belt as part of the Green Infrastructure, backbone of a pan-European ecological network and living cultural heritage.

The Eisenach Resolution is available at:

https://www.europeangreenbelt.org/fileadmin//user_upload/Eisenach_Resolution.pdf



Figure 2: Anja Siegesmund, Thuringian Minister of Environment, and Gabriel Schwadeler, Chair of the European Green Belt Association, signing the Eisenach Resolution, © J.Buldmann/BUND