

**Our vision:**

A uniting symbol of peace highlighting Europe's commitment to the sustainable development of its communities and the safeguarding of its natural heritage.

**Introduction**

Ecosystems span the political divides that 'separate' countries and the problems created in one country can affect its neighbours. Concern for the environment has provided a powerful instrument for integrating people across political divides.

The 'Iron Curtain' running from the Barents Sea to the Bosphorus, divided Europe for almost 40 years. Most strongly expressed in Germany, it divided the country and the people with a barrier spanning 1400km. This misguided and inhumane barrier created a 'forbidden zone' where no activity was allowed. Elsewhere landscapes were being shaped and modified by intensive agricultural and development processes, but habitats within the forbidden zone were given a 30-year breath of life.

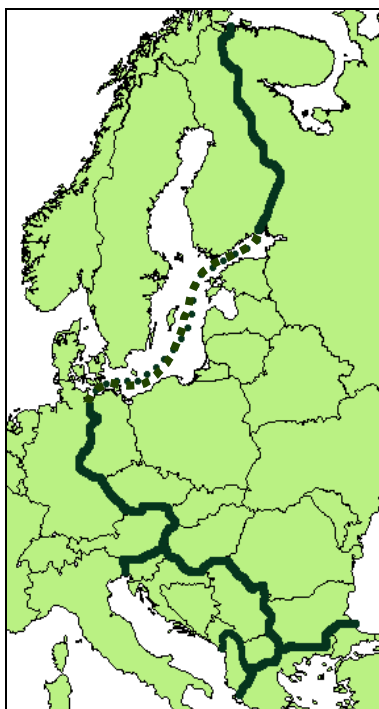
Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, there remains a strip of habitat running the entire length of Europe, which remains comparably undisturbed in many places. The latter is true for many larger adjacent areas of high conservational value, which are connected by this habitat strip. It is the aim of the 'Green Belt' project to have this entire strip, or key habitats within it, as well as the connected areas become part of an ecological network. The Belt would act as a symbol of union between East and West and as a key element to Europe's global commitments to halting biodiversity loss by 2010.

**The Green Belt**

The pan European Green Belt exists in three main sections:

- 1) The Fennoscandian Belt – between Norway, Finland and the Russian Federation;
- 2) The Central European Belt – running through Germany, between the Czech Republic, Austria and Hungary and extended to the Adriatic Sea;
- 3) The Balkan Belt – running along the barrier that separated Balkan countries, ending at the Black Sea.

**The proposed route of the Green Belt through Europe**



The structure of the Green Belt will differ depending on the region within which it is located. In some areas the Belt will be a continuous strip of land, either constituting part of existing protected areas, or being declared protected. Elsewhere it is envisaged that the Belt may be constructed through the linking of trans-frontier protected areas and the protection of other key trans-frontier habitats.

**The importance of the Green Belt**

The Green Belt represents an opportunity to strengthen the unity and integration of countries within Europe, especially those that will be either side of the new border after the accession of 10 states to the EU next year. The initiative will hopefully show how peoples can join hands to overcome political differences, a theme echoed by its origins in the dismantling of the Iron Curtain.

Next to its political and symbolic importance, the initiative presents significant applied benefits to biodiversity conservation in Europe, including:

1. Helping participating states uphold commitments made under international agreements (Bern Convention, Bonn Convention, Convention on Biological Diversity) to maintain biological diversity in Europe.
2. Helping states to fulfil their commitments to halt the loss of biodiversity in Europe by 2010 (5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” in Kiev 2003).
3. Help states implement protected areas legislation either under the Emerald network or the European Union Natura 2000 network.
4. Increasing the store of protected biodiversity in Europe;
5. Increasing connectivity between protected areas (also important for the fulfilment of nature conservation legislation).
6. Providing greater integration between protected areas and the land around them.

### **Socio-economic development**

As well as ecological advantages to the Green Belt, there are a number of socio-economic benefits to people living in and around the areas proposed to be part of the Belt, which include:

1. Increased development through the provision of funding sources at the European and local level.
2. Provision of ecosystem services, such as nutrient cycling and water-level regulation, that would be very difficult and costly to reinstate if degraded or replace with artificial methods.
3. Increased income to these regions generated through the development of sustainable tourism, which would stimulate support services and also provide an additional market for local products.
4. A strong planning instrument to steer inter-regional and cross-border infrastructure development projects.

### **The Bonn and Durban outcome**

Meetings held in Bonn, Germany and Durban, South Africa (as part of the IUCN World Parks Congress) in 2003, brought together representatives from NGOs, government agencies and scientific institutes to discuss the issues related to the Green Belt. It was suggested at these meetings that BfN and IUCN would invite each country bordering the Green Belt to nominate either a person or institute

as member of a working group. This group could then choose regional focal points to co-ordinate actions to implement the Green Belt. It was also decided that the first course of action was to determine the status of the Green Belt throughout its complete length and to organise the first meeting of the Working Group.

### **First Conference of the Working Group**

To launch this ambitious project, BfN and IUCN are organising a conference to establish a pan-European connection of regional Green Belt initiatives. The conference will take place 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> September at the Fertő-Hanság National park in Hungary. The conference will serve to establish the Green Belt working group and focus on the political, local and scientific aspects of the process. Experts, including those from NGOs, will be invited to speak at the meeting about the status of the Belt and associated protected areas along its length. This meeting will contribute to the selection of the most appropriate regional and national project opportunities to implement the Belt. It is also planned to discuss possible funding opportunities that exist at the local, regional, European and global level to ensure that the Green Belt becomes a viable ecological corridor.

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#### **Current project partners:**

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[www.bfn.de](http://www.bfn.de)

**Bund Naturschutz in Bayern**  
<http://www.bund-naturschutz.de>

**Euronatur**  
[www.euronatur.org](http://www.euronatur.org)

**IUCN – The World Conservation Union**  
[www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org)

Please see: [www.greenbelteurope.org](http://www.greenbelteurope.org)

Report of the 2003 conference (download) at:  
<http://www.bfn.de/09/090203.htm>