Abstract The twentieth century has witnessed a rise to prominence of the concept of biodiversity and underlying concerns with nature conservation, extinction of species, environmentalism, and the structural decline of biodiversity. With national governments and civil-society organizations taking the lead, biodiversity has eventually become part of the policy agenda of several international organizations. The present contribution focuses on four predominantly European organizations and their understanding and prioritisation of biodiversity issues: the League of Nations, Comecon, the Council of Europe, and the European Community/Union. The chapter demonstrates a transition from the protection of individual rare species threatened by extinction to the more structural approach of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and Natura 2000. It shows that in addition to concerns about environmental degradation, international organizations’ embracing of a biodiversity agenda was always informed by considerations of power and strategic interests as well.

Keywords biodiversity; extinction; international organizations; Natura 2000; European Union

1 Introduction

During its first weeks in office, the von der Leyen Commission (installed in 2019) announced the European Green Deal for the European Union (EU). Frans Timmermans, one of the three executive vice presidents, is in charge of the programme with a budget of EUR 1 trillion, which aims at developing the first European Climate Law. Despite the hefty price tag, the information provided by the European Commission, in the format of an official communication, to EU citizens focused on benefits (“What’s in it for me? Advantages for individuals, businesses and society”) instead of costs and consumer renunciation.

It was only 35 years ago that the Delors Commission (1985–1989) made the environment, for the first time, part of one of the then 12 directorates-general (DG) in the form of the DG Environment, Consumer Protection and Transport.
In strictly legal terms, the European Communities (EC) would only obtain competence in the field of environmental policy when the Single European Act was adopted in 1986. However, beginning in the 1970s, nature conservation and environmental protection had already been gradually added to the European agenda, being considered inherent to the level playing field of the common market. A central feature of the endeavours to protect Europe’s nature since then has been the combination of environmental and instrumental motives. European institutions have identified “Europe’s nature”, the environment, and climate change as vehicles to demonstrate their own raison d’être and to find new momentum and supporters of the European project – after periods of political standstill (then) and the Brexit conundrum (now).

Conserving Europe’s biological diversity – its flora, fauna, and habitats – involves a wide array of actors, including state and subnational authorities, European institutions, scientific experts, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) representing environmental interests, hunters, farmers, and fishermen. Through their actions, these actors have contributed to a veritable Europeanization of biodiversity protection, leading in 1992 to the adoption of the Habitats Directive and the creation of Natura 2000, a network of nature protection areas in the territory of the EU. Europeanization, as understood in this context, refers to multiple things. First of all, in the course of the twentieth century, biodiversity policies became more uniform; they became entangled and covered an ever-larger territory. Spatially, green belts and ecological corridors have served to enhance the connectivity of protected areas in Europe. While Natura 2000 applies to the territory of the EU, countries such as Georgia, Belarus, Norway, and Moldova are connected through the Council of Europe’s (CoE) Emerald Network of conservation areas. Second, in legal terms, biodiversity policies became increasingly integrated. Starting with the CoE’s Bern Convention (1979), which countries can voluntarily sign, nature conservation policies became part of the European Union’s acquis, the body of common rights and obligations that are binding for all EC/EU countries. Third, a shared love of European wildlife and landscapes was, and still is, regarded by some of the actors involved as a potential source of a European identity “by giving people a collective sense of the expanse and beauty of our continent”.

This chapter focuses on international organizations and their contribution to nature conservation and restoration policies in twentieth-century Europe. The four international organizations that this chapter analyses – the League of Nations (1920–1946), the CoE (since 1949), the EC/EU (since 1957), and Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon, 1949–1991) – have been selected not just because they were the only or most important organizations when it comes to pushing for biodiversity protection policies, but also because they were the
main (non-military) organizations for regional cooperation in Europe in the twentieth century. In all four cases, environmental and biodiversity policies were, in reality, only introduced at a later stage. This holds true for the League, being initially a security organization with a largely European membership. The European Economic Community (EEC) and Comecon, as Cold War organizations of economic integration, took decades to make the environment part of their agenda. For centralistic Comecon, resource efficiency was the incentive; for the more federalist EEC, distortion of competition in the common market turned out to be an important impetus. The CoE, with its membership including European and North American states as well as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (and its successor states), followed the broadening of the concept of human rights to include second- and third-generation rights, such as human environment.

This chapter features two types of factors. Firstly, there are those international organizations adopting conceptual frameworks for environmental issues and subsequently enacting regulations. The difficult negotiations within each international organization and discussions with stakeholders consequently act as a background. Given their very nature, international organizations were rarely the first to champion far-reaching concepts of environmentalism. And in several cases, when they eventually adopted such concepts, their motives were at least partly self-serving or unrelated. Secondly, it may be argued that these concepts themselves are agents of change. Arguably, biodiversity and cognate concepts played an independent role in shaping national and international policies.

In a policy field as contested as the environment, the question of how an issue is framed strongly influences the terms on which such policies are made. In line with this, actors involved in environmental policy-making have gone to great lengths to ensure that their preferred concepts would become accepted as the dominant frame to talk about and to regulate the issues at stake. Examples of such key concepts include biodiversity, sustainability (see chapter 15 by Seefried), and, more recently, carbon neutrality. This is especially the case in the EU, where “doing” environmental protection entails lengthy negotiating processes among European institutions, member states, and multiple stakeholders. Rather than issuing top-down commands, the European Commission can only propose legislation and work towards the adoption of directives and regulations. Within such processes, the successful framing of the problem at hand structures the playing field and puts certain actors in a more advantageous position than others.

Clearly, such concepts did not fall out of thin air, nor were they the only ones in use within the wider community of scientists, activists, and policy-makers throughout the twentieth century. Rather, they had often already circulated with-
in national or international settings, such as the United Nations and the CoE, and found their way into the EC through historical actors such as nature conservationists moving between those different political arenas. For this reason, the EU’s thinking and acting (i.e. strategic concepts and corresponding policy measures) will be put in a broader range of international organizations.

The League of Nations preceded the EU in this policy field, introducing nature conservation into international politics. While being a global organization in name, the League of Nations was strongly European-centred in terms of the countries involved and the geographical areas on which it focused. In that sense, we regard the League of Nations as the first intergovernmental organization active in the field of nature conservation in Europe.

The CoE added nature conservation to its agenda in the 1960s, with a focus on species and their habitats. In the 1980s, however, the CoE came to champion a more structural concern for species and their habitats. By mainstreaming the very concept of biodiversity, which was gaining traction in the 1980s, its directives would come to shape EU environmental policies.

Last but not least, Comecon was both the EEC’s communist rival during the Cold War and, from the perspective of the new member states joining in 2004 and 2007, its predecessor. Although the agenda included the prevention of wasting and depleting natural resources from an economic perspective, biodiversity did not figure on its agenda at all. Arguably, in post-communist societies, biodiversity was a concept transferred from the EU as well as from national environmental policies and protests.

In the current climate crisis, biodiversity has been redefined as a quantification of natural heterogeneity – itself a bulwark against global catastrophes. Brussels and Strasbourg have just begun to translate this new concept into conventions and policies. This is illustrated in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which specifically presents the protection of wildlife as one of the ways in which societies can become more resilient in the face of climate change.⁴

2 International Organizations and Nature Conservation

Biodiversity as a concept was only introduced into scientific parlance by Thomas E. Lovejoy in 1985.⁵ However, concern about diminishing natural diversity, threats to the richness of flora and fauna as well as man-made extinction had arisen much earlier among naturalists. Dominant strands of thought and modes of preventing extinction – the compilation of endangered species lists,
for instance – originate in the nineteenth century, when naturalists began to create taxonomies of living organisms, to make lists of endangered species, and to draw attention to the threat of extinction. Their advocacy efforts focused on regulations to preserve specific species and to create nature reserves, such as national parks.

In the course of the twentieth century, their focus shifted from individual species, usually those that were economically valuable such as mammals, birds, and fish, to associations of organisms. This shift is illustrated by the development of scientific ecology, which started in the 1920s. The post-war period saw a turn to global ecosystem ecology. This came to serve as a scientific base both for the protection of threatened species in particular regions as well as for broader types of natural resource management, which was included on the agenda of organizations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature in the 1950s.

The rise of the environmental movement in the 1970s strongly impacted the nature conservation movement. On the one hand, the broader political, social, and cultural changes of the decade, such as the emergence of an environmental consciousness among citizens, proved fertile ground for nature conservationists’ attempts to put the extinction of species back on the political agenda. In particular, wildlife extinction drew the public’s interest. On the other hand, the environmental movement was mostly worried about the destruction and degeneration of its own habitat and “Planet Earth” by the human race, for example nuclear waste and resource depletion. Policy measures regarding industrial pollution, related health risks, and waste were more prevalent but concerned humans rather than biodiversity. Biodiversity came second on environmentalists’ agenda. The policy measures adopted at that time related to the preservation and restauation of habitats for a wider range of (migratory) birds and mammals. Arguably, measures of this kind remained tied to conservationism rather than to environmentalism, as they did not entail a fundamental criticism of the role of humans in the degeneration of the environment and failed to question the right to exploit nature and natural resources beyond the threshold of sustainability.

In the 1980s, conservation biologists, such as Lovejoy, Michael Soulé, and Edward O. Wilson, sought to tackle the crisis in conservation by introducing the new and mediagenic concept of biodiversity, a contraction of biological and diversity. However, it was soon eclipsed by new, even more appealing concepts, such as sustainable development and climate change. In current climate debates, biodiversity is a holistic concept and refers to all forms of flora and fauna as well as ecosystems. As such, it is directly linked to the term Anthropocene, introduced in the mid-1980s as well, to underscore present-day, man-made
The focus of biodiversity is no longer on individual species but on the diversity of landscapes and biomass in a quantitative way. The diversity of habitats is portrayed as the key guarantor of biodiversity. The motivation has acquired a new urgency and focuses on the dire global consequences for humankind itself. The urgently needed policy measures are far more drastic and comprehensive for economic activities and life styles. What sets conservationists apart from both environmentalists and climate activists is their inclination to be content with establishing the causes of the decline in biological diversity and with protecting species without aiming to fundamentally change the political and socioeconomic order responsible for this dire state. Environmentalists and climate activists are more inclined to demand fundamental changes in humankind’s exploitation and management of the planet and its natural resources.

Throughout their history, advocates for the conservation of flora, fauna, and habitats have undertaken activities for a variety of reasons. These include aesthetic arguments, utilitarian motives (plants and animals are economically valuable resources), the pursuit of science (extinction limits the study of living organisms), and the intrinsic value of non-human beings, to name but a few. However, as the focus of this chapter is on international organizations that have shaped the development of nature conservation and restoration regimes in Europe, only those arguments that were put forward by and within these organizations, with a tangible impact on their policies, will be discussed. Shifting our view to these organizations – the League of Nations, the CoE, and the EC/EU – and their handling of natural diversity issues, a pattern emerges (Comecon constituted an exception, having no interest in biodiversity whatsoever).

For decades, up until about 1970, the common denominator was a genetic or species view of biodiversity. Organizations like the League of Nations or the CoE were not concerned with rare species going extinct. Whaling and some other hunting practices thus required regulation for economic and ecological reasons. Arguably, in the 1970s, international action concerning biodiversity remained associated with conservationism, since natural diversity was not a prominent part of the new environmentalist agenda. Pollution and depletion of resources as a direct threat to humankind and wildlife refuges were two different issues and concepts. The more recent conventions by the CoE and the implementation by the EU demonstrate the same.

3 The League of Nations: Endangered Species

Extinction, as an antonym of biodiversity, is a relatively recent concept referring to human interference with natural habitats while acknowledging the responsi-
bility towards preventing species from becoming extinct. The classic example is the dodo, a flightless bird species from the island of Mauritius, first described at the end of the sixteenth century and extinct less than a century later. Only in the mid-nineteenth century did biologists come to accept that extinction was an unmistakable possibility in nature. The dodo is a case in point; the aurochs (extinct in 1627) and the Tasmanian tiger (1936) are others. Scientific taxonomies and population counts made the ongoing destruction of natural habitats and the conservation of landscapes a public issue by revealing the irreversible extinction of species and the conservation of endangered animals, predominantly mammals (see figure 1) and birds (see chapters 3 by De Bont and 4 by Wöbs/Ziemek).

Unlike the above cases of rare exotic animals, two mammals aroused concerns beyond a small community of conservationists, becoming known to a worldwide public: the buffalo and the whale. For a long time, both were thought to exist in such plentiful numbers that even intense hunting and modern hunting techniques could not endanger their sustainability as a species. More importantly, in the two cases, the threat of extinction had disastrous consequences for entire industries involved in hunting and processing these large mammals of the American plains and the oceans, respectively. Thus, extinction became primarily an economic rather than an ecological category and concern. The same long-term economically motivated concept of sustainability is apparent in forestry (see chapter 7 by Hölzl/Oosthoek).

In the West, nature conservation made some headway around the turn of the century, with the creation of the world’s first national parks: the Yellowstone National Park in 1872, the Swiss National Park in 1914, or the Białowieża National Park in Poland in 1932. After the First World War, nature conservationists were quick to realize that the first endeavour at establishing a world government, the League of Nations, offered new opportunities for their agenda. In addition to its core responsibility, world peace and conflict management, the League embraced a wide array of other issues, ranging from economic development, migration, and refugees to trafficking, intellectual property rights, and, indeed, nature conservation. Setbacks in the 1930s to the League carrying out its primary aims made the League’s Secretariat all the more eager to claim success in such supplementary issues. Thus, nature conservation not only resonated with the organization’s ambitious objectives of world government, peace, and prosperity but also served to prop up the reputation of the League in its waning years.

Conservationist NGOs and famous protagonists, such as Paul Sarasin and Pieter van Tienhoven, were in close contact with the League’s Secretariat, situated in Geneva. The League, conversely, was the first international organization to involve such (idealistic) stakeholders in its endeavours. Their awareness of the need for concerted action to safeguard a variety of habitats and species was
spearheaded by the concept of national parks. The efforts to install a League commission for nature protection, however, came to naught. Actually, it would only bear fruit after the Second World War and the demise of the League. The traction of these ideas among the member states of the world organization at large seems to have been insufficient in a time of economic crisis.

In retrospect, the nature conservation issues on the League’s agenda mainly regarded fisheries and whaling (see figure 2). Its main feat was the Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (1931), arguably a prefiguration of the United Nations worldwide moratorium on whaling in 1981. The convention was greatly facilitated by the concerns of whaling nations (the United Kingdom, Norway, and Germany) over the economic extinction of the most sought-after species (i.e. sperm whales, humpback whales, and right whales). Due to much-improved whaling techniques, whale populations decreased markedly over the 1930s as well as the yield of the whaling expeditions. Given the small profit margins, the trade-off between maximum profit and the sustainability of the whale populations required worldwide regulation. The League consistently referred to whales as “riches of the seas” and never doubted humankind’s right to exploit these riches to the greatest degree. The convention failed to mention at all the
threat of ecological extinction of rarer wale species that were of no interest to the hunters.¹⁷

In sum, as far as biodiversity and the extinction of species were concerned, the League’s Secretariat, experts, and associated conservationists were far more ambitious than the member states. Its main tangible achievement, and an exemplary one for the post-war era, was driven by the economic interests of a number of member states. Fishing and hunting were regulated with an eye on the sustainability of species – and the related industries. The League’s legacy, as far as biodiversity was concerned, mainly evolved around notions of sustainability, habitats, and natural richness as such, rather than conservationist strategies and their implementation. Not only were its policy measures largely ineffective but they were also motivated by economic rather than by ecological interests. The League’s understanding of environmental protection was linked to a handful of mammals, magnificent landscapes, and national parks. In the long run, however, the legacy of the League – both in the internationalization of nature conservation and environmental policies and in the powerful concepts of sustainability and biodiversity – became building blocks for the CoE, the United Nations, and the EU in this policy field.
4 Comecon and Resource Management

Comecon was founded in 1949 in reaction to the Marshall Plan and, later on, to the EC. Much like its capitalist counterpart, the Eastern bloc organization was not a forum for issues of conservation or the environment. In the 1970s, a logic of economic sustainability placed natural resources on the agenda of the Comecon meetings. A quarter of a century later, the accession process to the EU thus confronted ten candidate member states with EU regulations for environmental issues in general and biodiversity in particular, which had no equivalent in previous multilateral cooperation in the East. Yet, communist states had subscribed to most of the worldwide nature conservation agreements. Nature parks and the conservation of natural landscapes and habitats coexisted with policies of forced industrialization.

In the interwar period, not only the Soviet Union but also the new nation-states of East-Central Europe had been part of the general trend towards nature conservation. Nature parks were created in most Eastern European countries more or less simultaneously with those in Western Europe. The Voronezh Nature Reserve was created in 1927, the Retezat National Park in the Romanian Carpathian region in 1935, and the then Yugoslav Plitvice Lakes National Park in 1949. In the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the League for the Protection of Nature was one of the largest mass organizations, with up to 50 million members. In July 1975, the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union passed the Act on Protection of Nature and Exploitation of Natural Resources. Most people’s republics introduced a national environmental council at the governmental level and first policies in the late 1960s or early 1970s. The protection of landscapes and species-type biodiversity became a tolerated form of activity by groups of citizens and academics in Eastern Europe because it did not question the legitimacy of the communist regime. This tradition persisted after communism, with civil society organizations either demanding access to information (on industrial pollution and the related health risks) or advocating classic forms of nature conservation rather than environmentalism.

Even before the Club of Rome’s report from 1972, both state authorities and citizens in the Soviet Union began to reconsider the limits to the seemingly inexhaustible natural resources of the Russian territories. Following Moscow’s lead, Comecon began to prioritize the management of natural resources and the prevention of wastefulness in its annual international meetings. Already in 1971, Comecon installed the Committee for Scientific and Technical Cooperation and the permanent Council on Matters related to the Conservation and Improvement of the Environment to coordinate environmental policies. In 1974, Come-
con introduced its first environmental programme for the next six years. The programme focused on pollution and waste as well as on the rational use of natural resources and relied on science, planning, and management to reconcile environmental protection and economic development. The conservation of ecosystems constituted one of many issues on the agenda. More importantly, in terms of international cooperation within the socialist bloc, Comecon lacked the formal authority and supranational power of the EEC to enforce common standards and interfere with national economic plans. Science and technology were used as an alternative vehicle for policy-making. Improved planning capabilities and enhancements in the efficient use of natural resources were assumed to solve the fundamental contradiction between higher production and environmental protection.

In negotiations on cooperation between Comecon and the EC beginning in the mid-1970s as well as following the Helsinki Process, the environment featured quite prominently on the agenda. The plausible reason for this is the fact that the environment was considered one of the least politicized issues, a matter of common good despite all ideological conflicts. Again, most of the cooperation related to science and technology rather than trade and economics (see chapter 10 by Laakkonen/Räsänen).

During the second half of the 1980s, under perestroika and glasnost, environmentalism constituted one of the main pillars of anti-regime protests and mobilization. The pollution caused by Soviet mining and heavy industry as well as communist-type plans for the management and transformation of nature merged with national and democratic opposition movements. Green became one of the transmission belts for anti-regime mobilization in the Baltic states as well as in Poland and Bulgaria. Increasing awareness of the health risks for the population resulting from this industrialization added to the concerns about the decreasing living standards in the Eastern Bloc. Knowing that these health risks eroded the already fragile legitimacy of the regimes, the communist authorities belatedly introduced some measures (e.g. closing down some polluting factories) to ensure public health.

Generally speaking, in the 1980s most protesters held an anthropocentric understanding of the environment, comparable to localized protests against industrial pollution in the West in the 1950s. The destruction of the environment and the limitless exploitation of natural resources produced real and short-term consequences for the health and well-being of citizens. Nature was, at best, considered part of national dignity and power, not an inherent value as such (although not mentioning marginal ecological groups and those unconcerned with political agenda setting). Biological diversity was not a significant concept in this political confrontation, neither on the basis of endangered spe-
cies nor of habitats. In many heavily polluted regions of the former Eastern bloc, post-communist transition implied deindustrialization, but legacies of pollution remained (see figure 3). The new democratic regimes’ point of departure in environmental issues was on the agenda of the Green protests against the old regime.

Figure 3: Abandoned ferris wheel in amusement park in Pripyat in the Chernobyl exclusion zone. Sean Williams, 2017, Asset-a-grid.

In many cases, however, the necessities of economic recovery and the transition to a market economy soon sidelined ecological concerns, so much to the extent that even prime examples of Soviet industrial pollution became national possessions of the newly independent states overnight, for example the Chernobyl-type nuclear power plant in Ignalina (Lithuania) or the shale-oil extraction plant in Kohtla-Järve (Estonia). Much like in the Comecon years, lip service was paid to environmental issues and economic rationales prevailed. The environment was included in many regional agreements involving post-communist states in the early 1990s: The Central European Initiative, the Visegrád Group, and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. With EU pre-accession negotiations, candidate member states bargained over the costs and conditions of the environmental acquis of the enlargement process without involving parliaments and civil society to a great extent.
5 The Council of Europe: Habitats and Biodiversity

At its founding in 1949, the Council of Europe had high and wide-ranging ambitions, much like the pre-war League of Nations, when it came to peace and international cooperation. Nature and environment issues would only be added to its agenda one or two decades later, informed by its networks of activists from within organizations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. After around 1970, the CoE took up two different concepts of biodiversity and their policy implications. One is a conservationist concept that began as early as the 1960s in the Strasbourg conventions – e.g. the European Convention for the Protection of Animals during International Transport (1968) or the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes (1976) and focuses on individual endangered species, biotopes, landscapes, and public campaigns (see figure 4). Another, started in the 1980s, understands biodiversity as a vital and urgent concern for humankind’s long-term survival, requiring the management of habitats in Europe on a much more ambitious scale.

The conventions signed by the member states of the CoE initially followed the perspective of single endangered species and conservationism. Nature or environment were not touched upon whatsoever in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950), nor in the European Cultural Convention (1954).³¹ Actually, the first animal-related conventions deal with the international transport of farm animals and the slaughter of animals (from 1968 and 1979, respectively), both following strictly a logic of trade and commerce.³² Conventions on pollution of air, soil, and water relating to public health followed. Conversely, cruelty to animals was the main concern behind conventions on animal testing and on pet animals.³³

Nevertheless, the CoE’s earliest initiatives clearly predated the environmental crisis of the 1970s. Already in 1962, for instance, the European Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources was created as a permanent advisory body to the Committee of Ministers. Since 1967, the Centre Naturopa (in full, the Documentation and Information Centre for the Environment and Nature) has been part of the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Directorate of Environmental and Local Authorities. At that early stage, the focus was on informing and educating citizens as well as on protecting threatened mammals, the diversity of flora and fauna in general, and a variety of landscapes.³⁴ The Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources laid the groundwork for later actions by initiating the compiling of inventories
of species and habitats and by collecting data. Concerned persons were starting to become aware that the modernization of post-war Europe and its restored prosperity were detrimental to nature and biodiversity.³⁵

The overall message was that “the impact of urbanization, of industry, of agriculture and forestry, and of leisure pursuits upon the physical environment” required better management.³⁶ The newsletters of the Centre Naturopa – *Nature in Focus* and later on *Naturopa* (since 1968) – demonstrate the use of such a concept of environmental protection as well as the concerns over endangered species. Public awareness should remedy “exhaustion and misuse of natural resources”, according to the first issue of *Naturopa*.³⁷ Oil pollution of the seas, waste, and soil erosion are highlighted as threats to man’s living environment and health. The CoE declared the year 1970 to be the European Conservation Year at the initiative of its Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, with a clear focus on raising awareness and establishing nature parks (see chapter 12 by Vetter-Schultheiss).

Issues regarding biodiversity and endangered species in the Centre Naturopa’s communication to its member organizations and the general public re-
mained, however, limited to excessive tourist development or commercial interests endangering the survival of the Mediterranean monk seal or the alpine ibex, for example. A reference to “fast-changing environments” and “trends in the status of the world’s biological ‘capital’” in 1971 was a first hint at a broader understanding of biodiversity relating to habitats and nature as a treasure trove of genetic diversity and future medications – but still mostly regarding rare species. By the early 1980s, the scope of the newsletter was changing incrementally towards habitats.

The CoE’s understanding of biodiversity remained focused on landscapes, nature conservation, and identifiable threatened species. Economic motives, however, did not seem to play a role in the initiatives, with their restrictive scope, from Strasbourg. The initiatives focused, on the one hand, on investment in reconstruction after natural disasters or related environmental problems and, on the other hand, on conventions related to environmental protection. In 1999, the Resettlement Fund for National Refugees was turned into a full-fledged social development bank, the Council of Europe Development Bank. One of its priorities – the protection and management of the environment – refers to reconstruction in the aftermath of ecological and natural disasters, the protection of the natural environment as such, and the protection of natural and cultural heritage. Landscapes, however, are found in the framework of cultural heritage: they contribute to the well-being of humankind and, even, to the consolidation of European identity.

This conservationist concept have continued to be used in the new century. Two conventions stand out as they focus on the protection of the environment as natural and cultural heritage: the European Landscape Convention (2000) and, signed together with other international financial institutions, a declaration of the European Principles for the Environment (2006). In October 2000, the CoE adopted the European Landscape Convention, which encouraged states to engage in landscape policies, ranging from conservation to creation. The reference point for the convention clearly is the human perspective: harmonizing the social, economic, and ecological functions of nature for the sake of the well-being of humankind and European identity. The “quality and diversity” of European landscapes refers to the diversity of communities and identities, not to any type of biodiversity. (Yet, they may be cross-references from the biodiversity to the societal trope of diversity.) Later, seemingly as an afterthought, biological diversity was added as an argument, but the core mission of the convention and of the Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape remains a cultural one.

Diversity of landscapes, ecosystems, or flora and fauna, quite remarkably, are not mentioned once in the convention, and the convention explicitly address-
es all territory, not just unique or outstanding landscapes. In these respects, the CoE’s convention differs from the World Heritage Convention (1972) by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization by focusing exclusively on outstanding landscapes and their inherent universal value as cultural and natural heritage. In sum, the convention is about the nexus between landscape and human quality of life but lacks the typical urgency of the evil tidings, so to say, regarding climate change. The term biodiversity did not appear once in the biannual reports of the meetings of the bureau of the Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (2012–2019). Even the special report on climate change at the most recent meeting (November 2019) focuses on the threats that climate change poses to cultural sites and landscapes.⁴⁴

The pivotal contribution to biodiversity by the CoE is the Bern Convention. The stipulations and objectives of the convention exemplify the broader understanding of biodiversity, combining the older conservationists’ strategy of protecting prominent species and the new urgency of environmentalism. Connecting nature reserves and habitats all across Europe should create a critical mass of natural landscapes necessary for the conservation of various species. While the focus is no longer on a handful of well-publicized endangered species, mammals and birds remain the visible linchpins of the strategy. Typically, large mammals like wolves, lynx, or others need mobility and space to maintain a sustainable population.⁴⁵ As in many other policy fields, the Bern Convention became the basis of the EU’s policies for nature conservation in the Natura2000 strategy. Both organizations began to prioritize the protection of sites and consolidation of networks of habitats as a conditio sine qua non for the conservation of a wider range of endangered species.⁴⁶

Thus, since the 1980s, the CoE’s conventions and programmes have been moving towards an understanding of biodiversity that concerns the entire environment, including urban locations, agricultural land instead of biotopes, and habitats as refuges for specific animals or all of nature. The Bern Convention aims to conserve Europe’s wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats. It is an innovative biodiversity convention because of its approach of protecting both species and habitats. Furthermore, it not only recognizes the intrinsic value of wild flora and fauna but also includes forward-looking issues such as biodiversity adaptation to climate change.

6 The Greening of the European Communities

The European Union is generally considered to have some of the most progressive environmental policies in the world. Over the past 40 years, its body of en-
vironmental legislation has expanded to such an extent that it is considered unique among international organizations. European citizens recognize the EU as the primary actor in the field of environmental policy; here, its legitimacy seems all but undisputed.

This is a remarkable achievement given that no legal basis for environmental policies existed in the Treaty of Rome, establishing the EEC and Euratom in 1957. As late as 1968, the European Commission – the executive charged with initiating and drafting legislation – was reluctant to consider the EEC competent in the field of nature conservation. The volte-face of the European Commission and the gradual emergence of the Community as a Green actor need to be understood against the backdrop of growing concerns over the depletion of natural resources; the pollution of air, water, and soil; and the decline of natural diversity in the 1970s. Member state governments began to adopt national environmental regulations, which threatened to distort competition within the EEC. Harmonization of environmental legislation would turn out to be a solution to this. This coincided with European officials’ quest for a new source of legitimacy in a time when European integration seemed to be stagnating. In addition, the active part played by NGOs in putting rare species protection on the European agenda and the ineffectiveness of other non-binding international agreements all contributed to what amounted to a veritable Europeanization of biodiversity protection, which culminated in the establishment of the Natura 2000 network.

The term *Eurosclerosis* is used to describe the 1970s as a period of stagnation in European integration. The oil crisis exposed the inability of member states to act in a coordinated manner vis-à-vis oil-producing states in the Middle East. Moreover, attempts at increasing monetary coordination grounded to a halt in the context of the global economic recession. This image, however, only partly holds true. In fact, the 1970s were also the decade in which important new policy areas were added to the European Commission’s portfolio, such as that of the environment. At a meeting in Paris in 1972, heads of government renewed their interest in European integration and called upon the European Commission to develop an environmental policy. Aware of the need for the Community to boost its legitimacy, they considered the enhanced protection of the environment and consumer rights an important means to bridge the gap with European citizens and to make the EEC more responsive to their concerns. The CoE declared:

Economic expansion is not an end in itself. It should result in an improvement in the quality of life as well as in standards of living. As befits the genius of Europe, particular attention will be given to intangible values and to protecting the environment, so that progress may really be put at the service of mankind.
Called upon by the heads of state and government, the European Commission proceeded to work out an Environmental Action Programme, which was adopted by the Council of the EEC in 1973.\(^{51}\)

The proactive stance by member states can only be understood in the global context of a growing awareness of the detrimental effects of industrialization and economic growth on the environment. On an international level, governments had been engaged in the preparations for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which took place in Stockholm in June 1972. In domestic contexts, concerns about the state of the environment led to the national governments’ adoption of an increasing number of environmental regulations. These now threatened to distort the functioning of the common market, which acted as the core of the European project. This instrumental reason proved decisive for the European Commission to put the environment on the European agenda.\(^{52}\)

Yet, the rise to prominence of the EEC as a central policy-maker can only be understood by looking beyond the role of national governments. A variety of actors had considerable influence, including members of the European Parliament, proactive European Commission officials, nature conservation and environmental organizations, scientific experts, and the European Court of Justice. By adopting a wide range of political strategies, they helped to transform what was initially merely a vague proposition into an extensive body of binding environmental legislation.

Members of the European Parliament laid the groundwork for the adoption of the first Environmental Action Programme. They prepared reports about water and air pollution at the beginning of the 1970s. In 1969, news had reached European citizens about the pollution of the river Main caused by the pesticide Thiordan. The pollution resulted in the death of huge amounts of fish and aroused concerns about the quality of drinking water in the Netherlands, located downriver. In response to this event, the European Parliament’s Committee on Public Health and Social Affairs drafted a report on the protection of inland waterways. In this report, the committee called for the harmonization of national anti-pollution standards, which threatened to distort international competition. Two dimensions of this report stand out. First, in addition to addressing the risks to public health, the committee stresses the economic risks of river pollution by referring to companies that rely on clean water as a resource. Second, it discusses the role played by other international organizations, such as the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine against Pollution (founded in 1963), and highlights their ineffectiveness. As opposed to the supranational EEC, these organizations were built on an intergovernmental basis and could only do research and propose non-binding recommendations. The members of
the European Parliament framed their appeal for Community action in the field of environmental policy in such a way that it aligned with the EC’s legal basis and existing competence.\textsuperscript{53}

In addition to the members of the European Parliament, activist commissioners, such as Sicco Mansholt and Altiero Spinelli, were crucial in pushing forward the environmental agenda. Mansholt – who, as the commissioner for agriculture from 1958 to 1972, had been in favour of its mechanization and intensification – had changed his ways by the 1970s. Appointed as the president of the European Commission in 1973 and under the influence of the Club of Rome, Mansholt became an ardent advocate of a more sustainable use of natural resources (see chapter 15 by Seefried). Spinelli, the European commissioner for industry, set up the working group to prepare the action plan.\textsuperscript{54} A decade later, Stanley Clinton-Davis and Carlo Ripa di Meana, two of the commissioners for the environment (1985 – 1988 and 1989 – 1992, respectively), played a crucial part in the preparation of the Habitats Directive.\textsuperscript{55} Over the years, the European Commission officials, for instance within the Environment and Consumer Protection Service, would be an important factor. This was especially the case when they were able to combine a deep knowledge of the workings of the Community with (amateur) expertise in nature conservation and to strengthen ties with the nature conservation movement.\textsuperscript{56}

Nature conservation and environmental organizations were important agenda setters. They were able to exert considerable influence through a range of strategies, such as lobbying European institutions, raising public attention through media campaigns, organizing public protests, building strong coalitions (e.g. the Working Group of European Bird Protection Societies – later, BirdLife Europe), and providing indispensable expertise.\textsuperscript{57} Moreover, they recognized the multilevel character of the Community, which meant that different venues to exert influence were available to them on national and international levels. Other interest groups such as hunting associations followed suit; however, their late arrival to Brussels was a disadvantage, as compared to environmental organizations that had recognized the importance of setting up shop, so to say, in Brussels at an earlier stage.

NGOs did not have a direct part in the first stages of developing an environmental agenda for the EEC other than, of course, contributing to a general atmosphere in which political authorities ascribed increasing importance to the environment. As Jan-Henrik Meyer shows, however, they caught up quickly. The year 1974 saw the establishment of the European Environmental Bureau, a grassroots network of NGOs funded by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Information and Communication. Initially a small organization, it had grown into a network numbering 35 members by 1980.\textsuperscript{58} As the funding
mechanism already suggests, there were mutual benefits to be gained from concerted action by NGOs and the European Commission. The involvement of environmental and nature conservation organizations enhanced the legitimacy of the European Commission’s endeavours in the field of the environment. Vice versa, NGOs sought access to European policy-makers in an attempt to circumvent reluctant national governments. Moreover, they realized the unique advantage that the EEC offered, as compared to other international organizations: the binding character of its legislation.⁵⁹

When it comes to EEC policies designed with the aim of protecting European wildlife species and their habitats, most notably the Birds Directive (1979) and the Habitats Directive (1992), nature conservation and environmental organizations would have considerable influence in their development. These nature conservation laws are “amongst the most powerful and far-reaching the EU has ever passed in the environmental sphere”.⁶⁰ The Birds Directive would become the foundation on which later biodiversity policies were built. The direct cause was the hunting of migratory bird species in Southern Europe, which caused public outcry in Northern Europe. The goal of the directive was to maintain the populations of “all species of naturally occurring birds in the wild state in the European territory of the Member States” at levels compatible with certain other requirements.⁶¹ It did so by severely limiting hunting and trading in birds and prohibiting specific hunting methods such as lime or nets. Moreover, bird habitats were subject to conservation measures.⁶²

The 1980s were marked by an institutionalization of the environment as a policy field within the EEC. In 1984, a separate Directorate-General for the Environment, Consumer Protection and Nuclear Safety was established within the European Commission. The Single European Act gave environmental policy its legal basis.⁶³ Moreover, as the Birds Directive was implemented, it became evident that the directive had teeth. Reluctant member states, surprised by the impact of the directive, chose to comply when the European Commission threatened to start proceedings or were forced to do so through the rulings of the European Court of Justice.⁶⁴

This was also the decade when the call for a more comprehensive biodiversity policy became louder. In 1983, the European Commission called for

[a Community] framework [that] would ensure that a network of properly protected biotopes, sufficient in both extent and number, and interlinked in a rational fashion, was set up and maintained. The network should be designed in such a way as to guarantee – as far as the habitat is concerned – the survival of all species native to the Community.⁶⁵
This quote illustrates a more general shift in the discourse about nature conservation within the EEC. Discussions pertaining to the Birds Directive had primarily focused on maintaining (migratory) bird populations by limiting certain hunting practices. Seen from this perspective, the case of declining populations of migratory birds constituted a collective action problem to be solved by supranational governance. NGOs managed to broaden the scope somewhat by underlining the importance of habitat protection, referring to the Ramsar Convention (1971), which aimed at the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands (see chapter 2 by Wöbse). Discussions about the Habitats Directive saw the emergence of a broader notion of the protection of plant and animal species by protecting, maintaining, and restoring their natural habitats.

This is reflected in the Habitats Directive, which protects European plant and animal species that are considered to be endangered, vulnerable, rare, and/or endemic. This is done through species protection and site protection measures. Species protection measures oblige member states to protect certain species when they are found in the wild on their territories. In addition, member states are asked to identify and designate certain conservation areas – called Special Areas of Conservation – that are of particular importance for the protection of certain species or habitat types. The totality of designated areas of nature conservation in the EU is called the Natura 2000 network.

Ecological motives – ensuring biological diversity in Europe – became much more important than what had been the case for earlier nature conservation policies enacted by international organizations. At the same time, the value of wild flora and fauna for the citizens of Europe – hence, its instrumental value – continued to be important. In addition, intrainstitutional rivalry continued to shape the outcome of environmental policies. Member states and the European Commission attempted at developing competence, while the EEC frequently referred to the “ineffective” CoE to substantiate its claim of having expertise in the field of species protection. Vice versa, the creation of the Emerald Network of “areas of special conservation interest” can in part be understood as an attempt by the CoE to halt the Habitats Directive. Countries critical of the extension of supranational powers to the field of nature conservation and land use, such as the United Kingdom and Denmark, pushed for an improved implementation of the Bern Convention, which resulted in the Emerald Network, emerging in parallel with the Natura 2000 network.

During the preparation and implementation stages of the Habitats Directive, the European Commission continued to rely heavily on the input offered by NGOs. Even before sending its proposal to the governments of the member states, the European Commission had it circulated among 200 NGOs for consultation. This was a novel practice, which stirred national governments. More-
over, environmental organizations came to play a crucial role in drawing up the lists of sites to be protected. As such, Natura 2000 can be considered an example of the completion of the participatory turn, began by the European Commission in the 1970s. Paradoxically, however, Natura 2000 came to be associated with technocratic governance during its difficult implementation phase. While the interests of environmental organizations were well represented in the policy process, the European Commission has been criticized for not taking into account local interests and socioeconomic considerations (rather than scientific) in selecting sites of protection.69

7 International Organizations and Concepts as Agents

In the course of the twentieth century, several international organizations contributed to a Europeanization of biodiversity policies in a geographical, political, and legal sense, as this chapter has shown. This being the case, biodiversity policies have always maintained their contested character. As we have seen, the hierarchy of concepts has shifted over time, from a narrow focus on the protection of species threatened with extinction, to the protection of wildlife and their habitats, to an understanding of biodiversity as a crucial feature of healthy and resilient ecosystems able to absorb shocks. These various meanings are still present today alongside other powerful concepts, such as sustainability and carbon neutrality. At the surface, their present-day prevalence seems to suggest the existence of some sort of Green consensus. However, the opposite is true: they attest in part to overlapping and conflicting value systems. The institutions discussed in this chapter have each adopted core concepts that served as a suitable frame to pursue their own ecological, economic, and political goals.

Arguably, the (European) international organizations – the League of Nations, Comecon, the Council of Europe, and the European Community/European Union – in hindsight embraced ground-breaking concepts of natural richness and biodiversity rather belatedly. In more than one case, the international organization began promoting biodiversity for reasons largely unrelated to the environment. In the cases of the League of Nations and Comecon, economic motives were important. For both the League of Nations and the EC, an institutional logic was paramount in “discovering” nature and the environment as a policy field. Both organizations used some policy success to shore up their legitimacy at the time. Environmental problems, being inherently transnational, seem to have played a minor role in setting in motion international organizations
for this cause, with the possible exception of the conventions of the CoE. Come-
con primarily addressed the efficient use of natural resources as a national strat-
egy, whereas environmental protection entered the EC’s policy-making as a cor-
ollary of the common market and non-tariff barriers.

The communities of activists and scientists that were in close communica-
tion with these intergovernmental organizations as well as some of their member
states championed more progressive concepts and strategies. At the same time,
achieving a consensus among national member states and defining workable
policies were a tall order. Thus, the concepts informing the policies and conven-
tions of the international community were bound to disappoint the more pro-
goingressive environmentalists. On a positive note, however, each one of the interna-
tional organizations did provide environmentalists with a forum for exchanging
and communicating their ideas and facilitated the collection of data to substan-
tiate the urgency of their claims. In retrospect, over the past century, environ-
mentalists, international organizations, and, last but not least, the concepts of
biodiversity they held all had agency in the grand narrative of the Europeaniza-
tion of biodiversity.

Notes

1 European Commission, “A European Green Deal. Striving to be the first climate-neutral
continent”, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en (ac-
cessed 30 April 2020).

2 This chapter uses the terms European Economic Community and Community alternately. They
also refer to the European Communities, the term used after the three communities (European
Community for Coal and Steel, European Economic Community, and European Atomic Energy
Community) officially merged in 1967. In 1993, the three communities were subsumed under
the European Union as the so-called first pillar). Nature conservation and environmental poli-
cies were developed in the framework of the European Economic Community, later the first pil-
lar of the EU.

3 See, for instance, the framing of the nature conservation projects by Rewilding Europe:


Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1–3; Frank Uekötter, “Von großen Zahlen, stillem Sterben
und der Sprachlosigkeit der Menschheit. Eine kleine Geschichte des Artenschutzes”, Aus Politik

6 Patrick Kupper, Creating Wilderness: A Transnational History of the Swiss National Park (New

7 Simone Schleper, Planning for the Planet: Environmental Expertise and the International Union

Schiavone, *The Institutions*, 100 – 104.


31 European Treaty Series (ETS) No. 005; ETS No. 018.

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ETS No. 176; ETS No. 219.

42 Together, the Cultural Heritage Committee and the Committee for the activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy were in charge of the convention. Maguelonne Déjeant-Pons, “Landscape Convention and Ecological Corridors”, *Environmental Policy and Law* 39, no. 3 (2009): 170 – 173.


45 In explanatory contributions, the head of the Cultural Heritage, Landscape and Spatial Planning Division, Maguelonne Déjeant-Pons, links the Landscape Convention to the ecological corridors of the Bern Convention, and thus the network is “to ensure the conservation of a full
range of ecosystems, habitats, species and landscapes of European importance”. Déjeant-Pons, “Landscape Convention”, 170.

46 Compare the Council of Europe’s Emerald Network, including non-EU states.


55 Ibid., 105.


57 Meyer, “Greening Europe”, 93–94.

58 Ibid., 89–90.

59 Ibid., 90–91.

60 Jackson, Conserving Europe’s Wildlife, 2.

61 Ibid., 52.

62 Meyer, “Greening Europe”, 93.

63 Hildebrand, “The European Community’s Environmental Policy”,

64 The United Kingdom was one of them. There is some irony to this given the large number of Britons involved in the development of this directive. Jackson, Conserving Europe’s Wildlife, 83.

65 Third Environmental Action Programme as cited in Jackson, Conserving Europe’s Wildlife, 82.

66 Ibid., 3.

67 Ibid., 141.

68 Ibid., 117–118.
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