

Central European Green Belt Borders separate – Nature unites



1 The **Baltic Sea** coast – Sand banks, coastal inlets, dunes, cliffs and salt meadows, kettle hole bogs and shallow water habitats house rare species like Harbour Porpoise, White-tailed Eagle and Sea Lamprey



2 **Elbe River** and **southern Altmark** form a flat rural region full of fens, ditches and lowland forests, where crane and nightjar call. BUND volunteers show visitors from all over the world the traces of history and nature.



3 **Steinach Valley** and **Linder Lowlands** In the foothills of the Thuringian Schist Mountains BUND – Friends of the Earth Germany – and the federal states Thuringia and Bavaria started the first regional project to preserve the Green Belt.



4 **Bavarian Forest, Šumava** and the adjoining forests form the ‘Green Roof of Europe’ with ponds and peat bogs and rare species like Lynx, Black Grouse and Pearl Mussel. The national park policy of ‘leaving nature at its own device’ caused many discussions, but finally a paradise for wild species.



5 The **Steppe lake Fertő/Lake Neusiedl** with its continuous reed zone surrounded by alkaline grassland, grazed by old breeds of livestock, is of international importance for bird migration and breeding. During the so called ‘Pan-European Picnic’ in August 1989 more than 600 citizens from GDR took their chance to withdraw to the west.



6 Trinational nature park **Goričko – Raab-Örség** – The name ‘Goričko’ describes the hills formed long ago on the bottom of the Pannonian Sea. In spite of two land reforms you still find a mosaic of small fields, orchards, vineyards, extensive meadows and natural streams.



7 The long mountain ridge of the **Karavanke Mountains** is rich in streams and springs. There are old illyric beech forests in the valleys and dwarf pine and larch stands further up. The Alpine meadows with daffodils, gentians and orchids are threatened by the abandonment of land use.



8 The **floodplains of Morava (8a), Danube, Mura and Drava** form hundreds of km of wilderness with alluvial forests, wet grassland, stagnant backwater and deserted riverbeds, where rare birds like Black Stork, Sandmartin and Small Tern find breeding places.



9 The abandonment of the multi-cultural **Rhodope Mountains** (Green Belt South Eastern Europe) during the Cold War made the wooded mountain range a paradise for many rare species like Wolf, Brown Bear and Imperial Eagle and several endemic plant species.



The European Green Belt

Ecological network and living monument

The 'Iron Curtain' divided Eastern and Western Europe for almost 40 years cutting off contacts between people on both sides. Nature seized the deserted border areas. Today a string of beautiful habitats with rare plants and animals connects Europe's landscapes and forms a living monument of European history.

Vision

To preserve the Green Belt as the backbone of an ecological network, running from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea, as a living monument and as a global symbol for transboundary cooperation in nature conservation and sustainable development.

< Green Belt Germany, Rhoen (K. Leidorf)



European history – the Iron Curtain

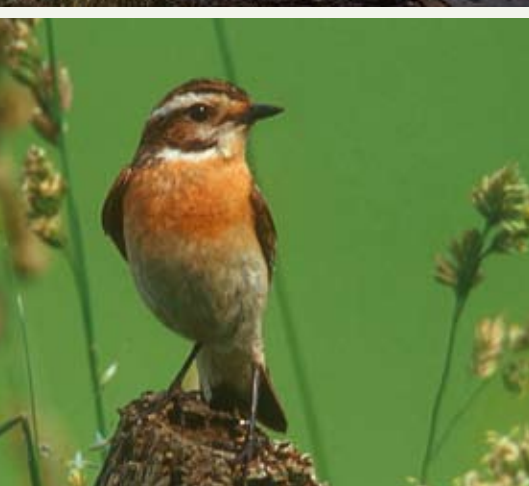
The history of the 20th century was determined by two world wars, the oppression of minorities, the frequent change of borders and the migration of many people throughout Europe. One result of the World War II was the establishment of the two ideological systems communism and capitalism, separated by a gigantic border construction called 'Iron Curtain': Barbed-wire fences, walls, spring guns, land mines and watch dogs created a death zone, that separated families and caused the death or injuries of hundreds of fugitives. With a weakened economy at the border, many residents moved out of the area or were resettled by the communist regimes.

The political change came in 1989

During the 'Pan-European Picnic' in Hungary more than 600 GDR citizens escaped to Austria, others emigrated via the West German embassy in Prague. After a critical period of demonstrations and political negotiations the reunification of Germany and Europe followed.

^ Border installations Green Belt Germany (K. Frobels)

< The opening of the inner German border (K. Frobels)



The Green Belt story

... from singing whinchats to international cooperation

Already before 1989 species surveys of the border area proved a rich diversity of plants and animals along the border. In November 1989 BUND, Friends of the Earth Germany, organised a first meeting of nature conservationists from East and West to preserve the habitats along the former inner German border as extraordinary ecological network and living monument. The participants coined the name 'Green Belt' and presented a **resolution for its protection**. Years of hard struggle for this aim followed, but today the German Green Belt is part of the National Nature Heritage.

2002 at the inauguration of the land art project 'WestEastern Gate' by Michail Gorbatchov, the idea of the 'European Green Belt' was born. Today partners from Russia to Greece form an international network for the protection of the Green Belt.

^ Whinchat, Austria (J. Limberger)

< International meeting in Grad/Slovenia 2006 (K. Malačič)



Threats

After the opening of the borders the situation along the Green Belt has changed. The **intensification of land use** leads to gaps in the habitat system and reduces biodiversity. **Road construction** dissects the Green Belt and disturbs the migration of species. **River regulation** and **hydroelectric power plants** impede the natural water flow and the migration of waterbound species. **Mining** and **waste deposit** destroy valuable habitats. Additionally the **abandonment of extensively used meadows** especially in mountainous regions leads to a decline of species like the Dusky Large Blue and affects beautiful sceneries.

< Hydroelectric power station, Mura river (J. Pfeiler)



Protection of the Green Belt

The legal protection is the most effective way to preserve the Green Belt. Unfortunately only parts of the Green Belt are legally protected. Hence nature conservationists purchased land for pilot projects, revitalised adjacent habitats and explained the Green Belt project to the public. Sustainable land use and regional development in these lesser developed border regions are crucial for the preservation of the ecological network Green Belt.

< European Otter (R. Hofrichter)



Experience Green Belt

The Green Belt visualises Europe's contemporanean history and natural heritage. Walking or hiking along the Green Belt, you can find traces of history and nature and see how human land use and inhuman separation have formed the landscape. You can cross Europe's most beautiful landscapes and meet European culture. But a slow approach is needed. Schooled Green Belt guides in national parks, biosphere reserves, nature parks and border museums can teach visitors how to find traces of history in the landscape and how to learn from nature without destroying it. Along the Green Belt there are already several hiking trails like the Thuringian Wartburg Border Hiking Trail (www.wartburgkreis.de/gruenes_band) or the Cross Border Adventure Trail from Austria to Hungary and Slovenia (www.naturschutzbund.at). Moreover, leading visitors to the Green Belt and its inhabitants can foster communication between countries and regions, between townsmen and rural population, and promote regional development in the formerly disadvantaged regions. The German project 'Experience Green Belt' (funded by the German Federal Agency of Nature Conservation) analyses different ways of promoting the Green Belt in the public and combining sustainable tourism with nature protection (www.experiencegreenbelt.de)

< Cyclists, Šumava (M. Bartos)



International cooperation: Nature unites!

The Iron Curtain separated people from each other – today the European Green Belt unites people from East and West, North and South in the effort to preserve the natural treasures of Europe.



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< Educational project in the Green Belt Slovakia (REC Slovakia)

