



MINISTRY OF
AGRICULTURE
DEPARTMENT FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

Ref. No: TMF 638/2017

Mr. Han Qunli
Director, Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences
Secretary, Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme

UNESCO MAB Secretariat
1, rue Miollis,
Paris 75732 Cedex 15
France

Subject: Follow-up progress report of the Hungarian biosphere reserves 2017

Dear Mr. Qunli,

Thank you for the continued support of the MAB Secretariat, and the suggestions of the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves.

In order to fulfil the criteria of the Statutory Framework for Biosphere Reserves, a number of actions were carried out between 2015 and 2017. We would like to inform you about the following progress carried out in 2016-2017.

As you know, the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves (IACBR) explained the results of the deliberations about the follow-up progress report of Hungary (submitted in 2016). In the case of Kiskunság Biosphere Reserve and Pilis Biosphere Reserve further activities were suggested until 30th September 2017.

Our progress report (2016) has been completed following the recommendations. We hereby submit the summary of the activities carried out following the suggestions of the MAB Advisory Committee. You will also find enclosed the completed follow-up progress reports and management plans of the Kiskunság and Pilis biosphere reserves.

We do believe that – taking into account the remarkable development efforts made – they will meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework.

We hope that the MAB International Coordinating Council will also consider it at its next (29th) meeting.

Budapest, 07/06/2017.

Yours sincerely,



Rozália Érdiné dr. Szekeres
Chair of MAB National Committee
Head of Department for Nature Conservation

Progress made to fulfil recommendations of the Seville Strategy in the Kiskunság and the Pilis Biosphere Reserves

In reply to the letter Ref:SC/EES/MB/17/5864/515/1 on March 13, 2017 concerning further data request on the progress made by the biosphere reserves Kiskunság and Pilis, the following clarifications are given.

PILIS BIOSPHERE RESERVE (PBR)

In accordance with the recommendations of the MAB Council's Advisory Committee and furthermore considering the suggestions that we personally received on the EUROMAB 2017 conference (Dordogne Basin BR, 4-7/04/2017) - we would like to present our efforts taken to meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

Development of the zonation system

At the time of the preparation of the PBR's Management Plan, in September 2015 – considering that the conciliations with the municipalities were not yet completed – we could only report the planned state of the modification of our zonation system. Our progress report in 2016 – with results of the successfully completed negotiations with the stakeholders – already contained the modified zonation system, showing the expanded transition zone.

To present one of the most significant developments, we would like to elaborate on our progress on re-designing the PBR's zonation system, in chronological order:

The zonation system of Pilis BR – considering that PBR is an “old generation” biosphere reserve, established before the 1995 delivery of the Seville Strategy – has been under a modification procedure since 2012 in line with the criteria of the Statutory Framework.

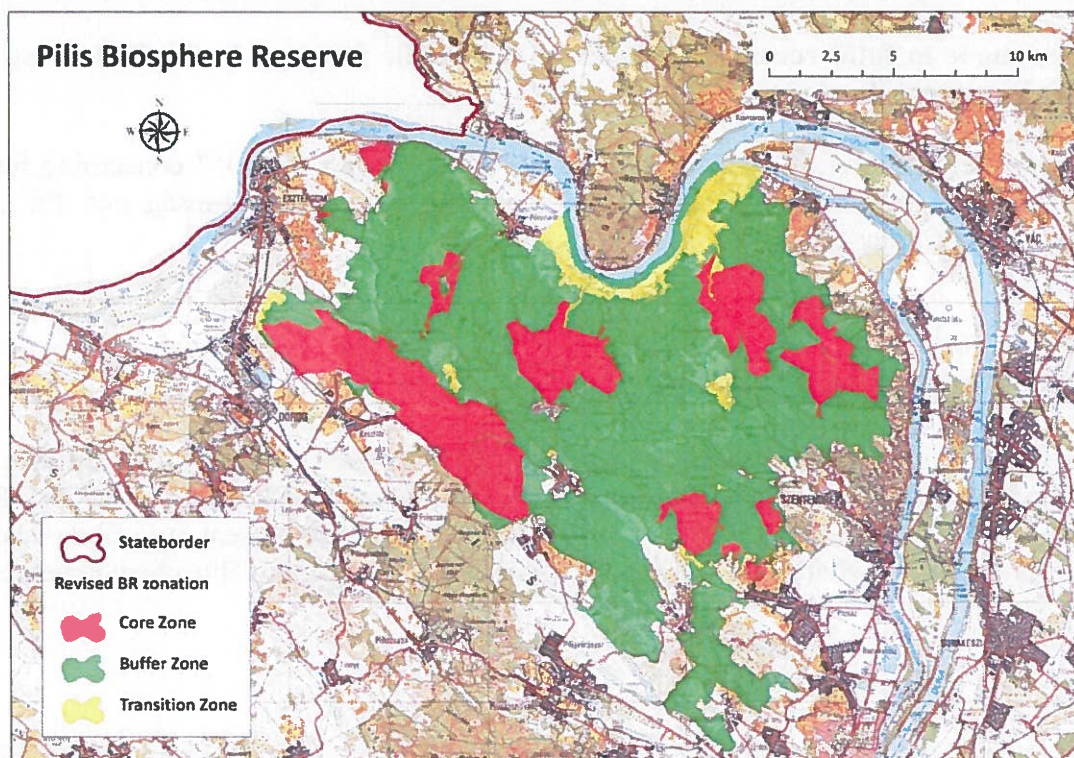
The different zones of the PBR have been identified and mapped, buffer and transition zones have been replanned to promote sustainable development and preservation of the core area.

In 2015, in accordance with the recommendations of the UNESCO (and particularly at the advice of Ms Meriem Boumrane), negotiations were launched to convince the local governments to join the PBR with the whole (or at least part of) the settlements' administrative area.

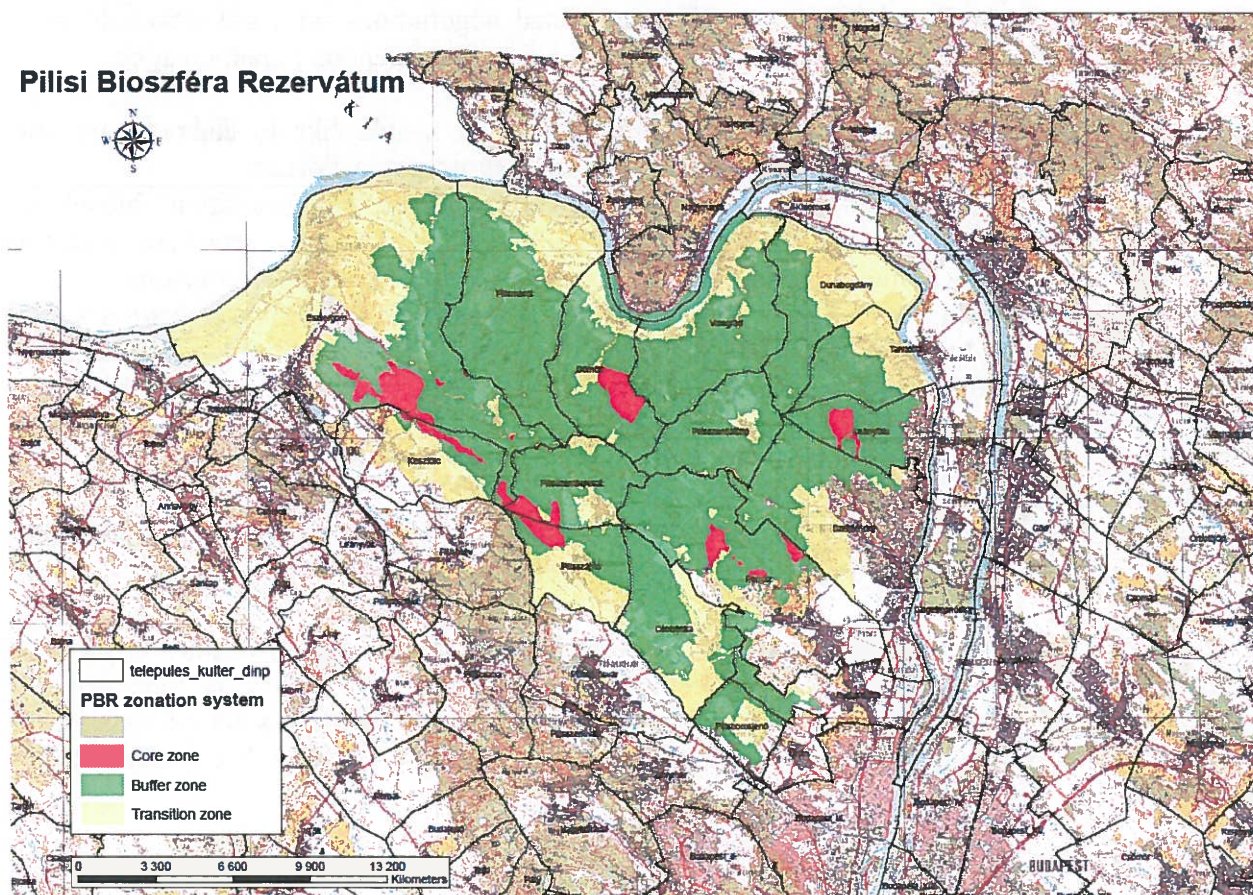
Among the requested 16 municipalities 14 were definitely interested in cooperation and in the re-designing of the zonation system, so the expansion of the transition zone could become feasible.

The results of the negotiations were finally confirmed by signing the Cooperation Agreement with the signature of the local stakeholders, NGOs, municipalities and management organizations of the PBR on the 17th of June, 2016, in Visegrád. With this act the expansion of the transition zone and the whole re-designed zonation system has been successfully confirmed.

Maps below show the re-designed zonation of the PBR: one that reflects the previous state of the zonation system and the other that shows the current state, the PBR's restructured zonation map with clear boundaries, fulfilling the Seville Strategy.



The former zonation system of the Pilis Biosphere Reserve



The Pilis Biosphere Reserve's restructured zonation map, with the expanded transition zone

About the zonation system, the followings need to be emphasized:

- In some cases almost untouched, valuable core zone areas can be found in the PBR, surrounded and bordered upon by urban areas (f.e. in Keszölc) with intensive usage. In this case the core zone is not surrounded by a buffer zone, because designation of a buffer zone around this area would have caused the territorial reduction of the core zone itself. It happens, when f.e. unique rocky grassland patches can be found on rock walls towering above the settlement – but in this situation these habitats – due to their exposure - are difficult to reach and their protection can be guaranteed despite the proximity of the town itself. Thanks to their location these natural assets are not at risk. Among the biosphere reserves, similar situation often occurs, where a natural area is surrounded by the urban area. We found the same situation in our partner Wienerwald Biosphärenreserve located in the immediate vicinity of the capital city Vienna.
- We consider as an enormous progress that most of the local governments were definitely interested in cooperation and most of the territory of the settlements could be integrated to the transition zone – but according to our plans we strive to convince to cooperate every local government concerned (see the map). The most important tool for this goal is the continuous communication and contact with the relevant stakeholders. We hope the municipalities that have not yet joined will join the initiative in the near future as a result of ongoing consultation. Local governments will see that the integration to the PBR as a transition zone would mean momentous prestige, great importance and real benefits, without restrictions. In order to strengthen our cooperation we decided to prepare a Slovak-Hungarian cross-border INTERREG SHKU project where the main objectives of the project are to involve the local communities in the BR's activities, and to establish e.g. touristic developments.

Active involvement of the local authorities in the biosphere reserve

In 2016 major structural changes have been made in the PBR's decision-making system – the goal was to involve the stakeholders to the PBRs activities and to make the decision-making system more democratic.

The most significant change is that the coordination board of the PBR was established under the name of the “Council of the Pilis Biosphere Reserve”. The Forum's first, inaugural meeting was convened in the Mogyoróhegyi Forest School in Visegrád, Hungary, on the 17th of June, 2016, where the Steering Committee of the PBR was elected as well. On the other hand, as a result of the consultations, on the meeting the participants accepted and signed the Cooperation Agreement that regulates the PBR's operation.

Since its inception, the Steering Committee holds regularly its formal meetings, the first meeting was on the 12th of September 2016.

We consider as an important step, the PBR stakeholders' cooperative INTERREG project. The PBR's Steering Committee decided to prepare a Slovak-Hungarian cross-border INTERREG SHKU project with the Polana Biosphere Reserve in Zvolen, Slovakia. The main objectives of the project are to involve the local communities in the BR's activities, and to establish e.g. touristic developments. As the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme informed us, our application registered under the registration number SKHU/1601/1.1/106 and submitted within the 1st Call for proposals successfully fulfilled the admissibility, administrative and eligibility conditions. As a next

step our project proposal is forwarded into the quality assessment. The results of the quality assessment and the decision of the Monitoring Committee on approval of the applications are expected in the 3rd quarter of 2017.

Please be informed that our updated and revised Management Plan – now complete with the re-designed zonation system and other developments outlined since the submission (see the Management Plan) – and the supplemented Progress Report can be found enclosed.

I Hereby confirm, that the documents submitted are on behalf of the Pilis Biosphere Reserve's Steering Committee.

KISKUNSÁG BIOSPHERE RESERVE (KBR)

Status of the transition area

Non-core or non-buffer zones of signatory towns form the transition zone of KBR on a voluntary basis.

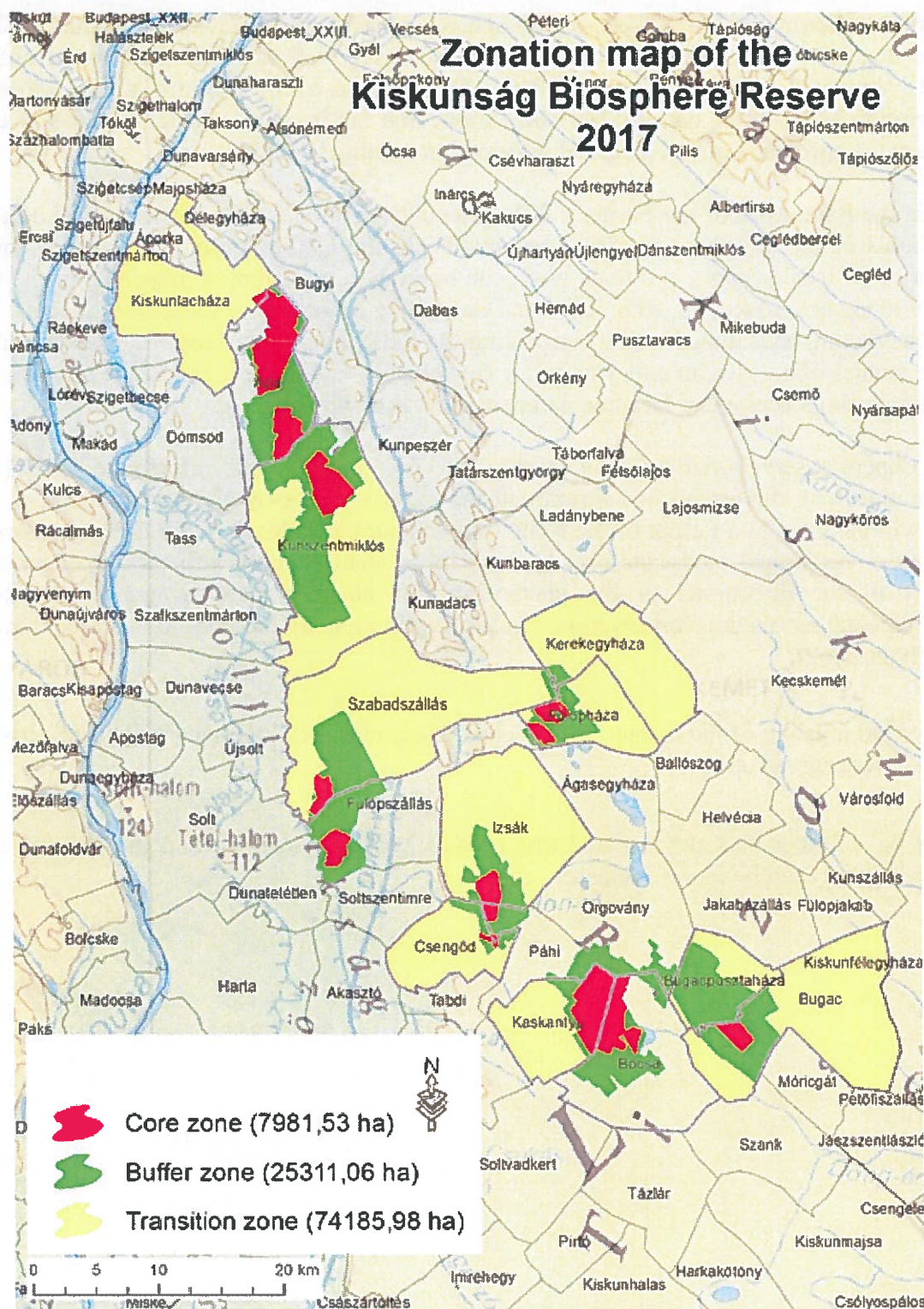
An Agreement for the operation of the Forum for the Kiskunság Biosphere Reserve was opened for signature to all municipalities within the planned new area of the biosphere reserve. It has been signed during the meeting on July 27, 2016 by the mayors of the following towns: Bugac, Bugacpusztaháza, Csengőd, Fülöpháza, Izsák, Kaskantyú, Kunszentmiklós, Szabadszállás. Kerekegyháza and Kiskunlacháza signed the agreement consecutively. Orgovány has not signed the agreement yet but it was represented as observer on both meetings of the forum in 2016. Fülöpháza expressed its interest to sign the agreement in 2017.

With joining of further municipalities, the area of the biosphere reserve will become one entity not only in the management tasks but physically also.

Membership is still open to those municipalities with biosphere reserve areas that have not signed the agreement yet.

As opposed to the core zones and buffer zones, which are declared by a ministerial decree, the designation of transitional zones are based on voluntary signatures of involved participating municipalities. The transitional zones are those areas of the signatory municipalities in the Forum for the Kiskunság Biosphere that have not been listed as core zones or buffer zones previously.

The maps of the Management Plan (2015) showed only the planned increased size of Kiskunság Biosphere Reserve (KBR). The updated version of the Management Plan and the Follow-up Progress Report show now the current status of KBR with a total area of 107 837 ha. The two documents were harmonized (see the Management Plan enclosed).



Updated zonation of the Kiskunsag Biosphere Reserve, 2017.

Cooperation with local communities and their active involvement in the KBR

Communication between nature conservation management and the municipalities of the forum and raising awareness for eco-friendly farming practices and the sustainable use of agricultural land among inhabitants and farmers of the transition zone are equally important tasks of the biosphere reserve.

A forum —Forum for the Kiskunság Biosphere— was formed between the municipalities (those that have signed the Agreement), the Kiskunság National Park Directorate and the MAB National Committee on July 27, 2016. The purpose of the forum is to strengthen the cooperation between the national park directorate and the involved municipalities as well as increase the speed and effectiveness of information relating to KBR.

Within the framework of the Forum a 20% discount of national park programs will be given to schools of the biosphere reserve, participation in the nature conservation environmental education of local schools, pro bono provision of temporary exhibition materials in the topic of environmental education, technical—and depending on available sources— financial help for constructing educational trails, signposting the KBR, help to develop the style and image of the municipality, give an opportunity for consultation with the experts of the national park directorate about ecological farming, nature conservation projects, etc.

A biosphere reserve prize will be awarded at first time by the directorate in 2017 in cooperation with the established forum and the mayors of the involved municipalities. The prize will be given to a farmer of the KBR who achieves excellence in the field of ecological farming or ecological landscape use. Municipalities shall support with their own tools the activity of the directorate in the preservation of nature values, awareness raising in environmental or nature conservation issues, distribution of methods of eco- and nature friendly farming.

The second meeting of the forum took place on December 20, 2016 where planned activities of 2017 were agreed upon.

Please be informed that our updated and revised Management Plan and the supplemented Progress Report can be found enclosed.