

# Four Bulgarian biosphere reserves have been approved by UNESCO

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*At the 29th session of the International Coordinating Council (ICC) of the Programme “Man and the Biosphere”, held in Paris from 12 to 15 June, four Bulgarian biosphere reserves were approved: “Central Balkan”, “Srebarna”, “Chervenata Stena” and “Uzunbudzhak”. They meet the requirements and principles of the **Seville Strategy\*** and are territories with specific flora and fauna, which are an example of the successful coexistence of humans with nature, a preserved environment and protected cultural and historical monuments.*

For 40 years, 16 Bulgarian biosphere reserves have been part of the European and global biological heritage. Our country ranks 3rd in Europe by number of biosphere reserves after Spain and Russia, and 6th in the world. The strictly protected areas in Bulgaria provide conditions for scientific research, exchange of experience, education and monitoring, but in recent years the concept of biosphere reserves has expanded and further

developed its meaning in the context of the current environmental situation. Gradually, the initial function of the reserves as a closed system intended solely for the conservation of genetic resources and ecosystems has also been oriented towards the harmonious use of natural resources. This new development of biosphere reserves is embedded in the concept of the Seville Strategy, under which, at the 29th session of the International Coordinating Council (ICC) of the Programme “Man and the Biosphere”, held in Paris from 12 to 15 June, four Bulgarian biosphere reserves were approved: “Central Balkan”, “Srebarna”, “Chervenata Stena” and “Uzunbudzhak”. The nomination of the four biosphere reserves was supported by local communities and the responsible state institutions.

## Biosphere reserves

Biosphere reserves serve as an example of the primary state of the ecosystem, and only in their natural environment can a qualitative assessment be made of the impact of the human species on nature.

Their status is declared by the International Coordinating Council (ICC) of the Programme “Man and the Biosphere” at the request of the respective country. They remain under the sovereignty solely of the country in which they are located and therefore are subject to the specific national legislation.

In order to be part of the World Network, the reserves must fulfil three main functions: a conservation function – preservation of ecosystems and genetic diversity; a development function – safeguarding cultural identity and natural endowments; and a logistic function – implementation of conservation education, scientific research and monitoring.

The zoning of biosphere reserves is interesting and is divided into three zones. The core zone includes all strictly protected areas (reserve) and ensures the long-term conservation of landscapes, ecosystems and waters. Next is the buffer zone, which surrounds the core and has a lower degree of protection. It usually covers a specific locality, but anthropogenic activities are also highly restricted there. The transition zone is the last one and in it agricultural and forestry activities are carried out; human presence is balanced and structured on the basis of sustainable environmental protection.

**\*Seville Strategy** – *In 1995 in Seville, Spain, a new era began for the development of the network of biosphere reserves. In the new concept, protected areas acquire a new international significance, dedicated to sustainable development in the 21st century. Biosphere reserves build upon their initial role as places where flora and fauna are protected and are transformed into models of biological diversity, encompassing the harmonious relationship between humans and nature.*