



europaean  
**greenbelt**

# European Green Belt

## Borders Separate - Nature Unites

Tracing the former Iron Curtain, which divided Europe into East and West for almost forty years, a Green Belt now winds its way from the Barents Sea to the Adriatic Sea, and on from there to the Black Sea. It serves as a connection between valuable landscapes, habitats, and people. Over 12,500 km, a unique habitat network, a living landscape of memory developed and is still growing today.





Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*)



Arnica (*Arnica montana*)

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### Treasure Trove of Biodiversity

Birds singing, the sound of the waves, the cry of an eagle, and the smell of wilderness places. Large mammals like brown bear, moose and grey seal, small insects such as wild bees and dragonflies, and rare plants such as arnica, all live here in harmony in the blooming meadows, the murmuring streams, the rich forests and the roaring sea. A splendid fan of rare habitats unfolds into an incomparable natural heritage. Where the Iron Curtain once separated people, nature found rest and built her home, then as is now.

Wild bee (*Anthophora plumipes*)



Former border tower at the inner-German Green Belt



Former border crossing in the National Park Thayatal-Podyji, Austria-Czech Republic

### A Landscape of Memory Against Oblivion

The Green Belt Europe is an extraordinary symbol of modern European history. This living monument describes the peaceful end of the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain. It transforms the tragic history of the 20th century into a symbol of European cooperation against man-made borders and for the natural world.

### A Lifeline through the Continent

A total of 49 national parks are located directly on the Green Belt and 7,319 protected areas line up within a 50 km-wide corridor. Distances between protected areas are shorter than in surrounding landscapes. Crucially, this allows wildlife to disperse, which is difficult in today's densely-populated Europe. The Green Belt is a key contribution to the Natura 2000 European network of protected areas and serves as a cross-national backbone for connecting habitat and green corridors. In the era of climate change, this migration corridor from South to North is invaluable for the conservation of innumerable species. In addition, nature provides vital services for people here, such as supplying fresh water, clean air and healthy soil.

### Threats

Buried under the natural beauty of Fennoscandia lie valuable raw materials such as iron, gold, copper, bauxite and oil, each awakening desires of industrial exploitation. The timber of the slow-growing boreal forest increases in demand and becomes more difficult to protect from deforestation, especially outside state-protected areas.

The Green Belt on the Baltic Sea is so popular with tourists that infrastructure such as hotels propagate along the coast, both commercial shipping and industrial fishing are increasing as well. As a consequence, nutrients are introduced by run-off into the sea and natural systems in coastal habitats are severely disturbed. This leads to hostile conditions for a large number of organisms.

The Central European section is crowded by intensive farmland, in Germany alone this leads to 26 separate gaps of one kilometer or greater in the protection of a continuous Green Belt. In the last decade, 5 % of the total EU area has been converted from natural areas to a picture far removed from nature, covered with concrete or fragmented by roadways.

In the Balkans, illegal poaching and logging alongside developing tourism infrastructure – in national parks and elsewhere – threatens the Green Belt and its residents. The construction of hydropower plants forever alters the innate course of unique river landscapes. **Let's take joint action to protect the Green Belt!**

Clear cutting in the Domogled-Valea Cernei National Park, Romania



## European Cooperation for a Vision

A singular vision of protecting Europe's natural and cultural heritage unites the 24 neighbouring countries on the Green Belt. Since 2003, governmental and non-governmental organizations have been working together in the European Green Belt Initiative. The European Green Belt Association represents and coordinates the initiative since 2014 and ensures the free exchange of information among participant organizations.

The actors of the initiative meet regularly to strengthen cooperation and share their ideas and experiences. At the 10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference in Eisenach, Germany, the participants unanimously adopted the "Eisenacher Resolution" as a joint message.

It appeals for political decision-makers, from European level to local level governments, to contribute to the protection and promotion of the Green Belt.



## Model Municipalities on the Green Belt - Global Ideas Implemented on Site

An outstanding town or municipality is regularly awarded a prize for its activities and measures toward the preservation and sustainable development of the Green Belt. The municipality of Haidmühle in the Bavarian Forest received the award in 2015, followed by the Austrian Leopoldschlag in 2017 and the town of Peja in Kosovo in 2018. For years, the Peja municipality has successfully prevented the construction of a hydroelectric plant that would have destroyed the natural course of the Lumebardhi river in the Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park.



Award of the city of Peja as model municipality, Kosovo



Lesser kestrel (*Falco naumanni*)



## Celebrating together - Green Belt Days in Europe

Each year, from September 18th to the 24th, there is a celebration along the Green Belt. Local groups, associations or municipalities – supported by the European Green Belt Association – plan public activities in order to celebrate the European Green Belt.

The activities are as varied as the Green Belt itself: In a youth work camp at the Green Belt Austria-Czech Republic, volunteers from all over the world meet each year for work-away missions, one recent example was preserving the steppe habitat for species such as feather grass and mountain alcon blue butterfly. Hikers from Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo meet atop the three-country peak in the Prokletije mountains, and elsewhere there are cycle tours, lectures, art projects or special events for kindergarteners and schools.

Young people in the international work camp at the river Malsch, Austria



## In Action

**Gaps in the Belt are closed, habitats for species are preserved and history is brought to life.**

Thus, drained peatlands in the Bavarian Forest (Germany) and in Šumava (Czech Republic) are being restored to their natural states. In the Slovenian nature park Goričko nesting boxes are installed in orchard meadows for cave-breeding birds. In Bulgaria, the rare lesser kestrel was successfully reintroduced in the Sakar Mountains.

Maps now display the protected areas for the entire European Green Belt. Analysis of land cover data from all over Europe illuminate where the habitat network can be improved in the future. All these actions for cross-border nature conservation require political support. The designation of the Green Belt in Thuringia as a national nature monument in Germany in 2018 is a strong signal. The motives and reasons behind this designation can be transferred to the title of UNESCO World Heritage – in the categories Nature and Culture – our dream for the entire European Green Belt.



# European Green Belt



\*in accordance with UNSCR 1244 and opinion of ICJ

# Milestones

**December 1989** The idea of the Green Belt is born in Germany. Similar initiatives begin in Fennoscandia and the Balkans.

**June 2002** At the opening of the land art installation West-Eastern Gate at the German Green Belt, the idea of a Green Belt Europe is expressed for the first time. Guest of honour for this occasion is patron of the European Green Belt Mikhail Gorbachev.

**July 2003** The first scientific conference on the European Green Belt takes place in Bonn, Germany. The European Green Belt Initiative is founded.

**August 2004** The first meeting of the working group for the European Green Belt Initiative takes place on the Hungarian side of the National Park Neusiedler See/Fertő-Hanság.

**August 2007** First comprehensive cartographic assessment of protected areas along the entire European Green Belt.

**December 2011** The European Green Belt is presented for the first time to the EU Committee on the Environment in Brussels.

## May 2013

- The European Green Belt is cited by the EU Commission as the only example of existing transnational „Green Infrastructure“.
- The European Green Belt Initiative celebrates its tenth anniversary in Berlin, Germany. Twenty countries sign or support the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation.

**September 2014** The „European Green Belt Association“ is founded in Slavonice, Czech Republic. Five years later, the Association would grow to 30 member organisations.

**2015** The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) names the European Green Belt Initiative as a model for pan-European cooperation, noting its innovative steering structure.

**October 2018** The 10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference takes place at the Wartburg World Heritage Site in Eisenach, Germany.

**November 2018** Thuringia's Green Belt becomes a national nature monument. With a length of 763 km, it is the longest contiguous protected area of the Green Belt in Europe.

Discover more:

[www.european-greenbelt.org](http://www.european-greenbelt.org)

## Facts

**Length: more than 12,500 km** ■

**24 nations** ■

**25 languages** ■

**49 national parks** ■

**9 biogeographical regions** ■

**47 % protected areas within a 1 km corridor** ■

**150 committed non-governmental and governmental organizations** ■

## Legal notice:

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(Martin Reimann, Marie Lingner, Holger Krömer,  
Daniel Drüg)

**Production:** Nova Druck Goppert GmbH

**Photos:** andrii\_lutsyk/Adobe Stock, Johannes Buldmann, Dieter Damschen, EuroNatur, eyewave/Adobe Stock, Philippe Fayt, Berndt Fischer, Otmar Fugmann, Green Balkans, Fatlum Hasani, Mika Honkalinna, Elke Körner, Jouni Koskela, Melanie Kreutz, Thomas Krüger, Metsähallitus Kari Lahti, Naturschutzbund Oberösterreich, nidafoto/Adobe Stock, Jari Peltomäki, Dalibor Petric, Tommy Pitsch, Stefan Porembski, Tomas Ruzicka, Helmut Schlumprecht, Jürgen Schmidl, Jörg Schmiedel, Alexander Schneider, Nora Sichardt, Wolfgang Willner

**Title page:** Prokletije Mountains Montenegro, Baltic Sea coast Estonia, river Kitka Finland  
**Poster page:** Green Belt Thuringia near Mitwitz, Germany, Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*), maiden pink (*Dianthus deltoides*)

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This brochure was sponsored by the Thuringian Ministry of Environment, Energy and Nature Conservation and the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation as part of the project „10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference“.

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*Take joint action*

*for nature*

