



## Elia and Ecofirst share their experience in managing ecological corridors under high-voltage lines

Nassogne | On 14 and 15 June, electricity transmission system operator (TSO) Elia took part in a workshop organised by the European NGO RGI (Renewables Grid Initiative) on the development of ecological corridors under high-voltage lines. More than 10 years ago, Elia set up innovative vegetation management systems in these corridors that are more conducive to the development of biodiversity. Nearly 30 participants from all over Europe took part in the event, the aim of which was to share the field experience gained since the Elia LIFE project was launched in collaboration with the French transmission system operator RTE. Ecofirst, the company responsible for creating these corridors in Belgium, took advantage of the event to present the summary report demonstrating the benefits of these corridors for biodiversity.

### 90% of forest corridors to be developed by 2030

Elia must respect safety distances around the electrical conductors of high-voltage lines in order to prevent incidents and to ensure security of supply. Conventional vegetation management consists of felling trees and razing all vegetation at regular intervals. In 2011, the Belgian and French transmission system operators set up the Elia-RTE LIFE project. The project is co-financed by the European Commission and the Walloon Region. The aim of this project was to create green corridors under overhead electrical lines in wooded areas to enhance biodiversity. At the end of the programme, the positive results encouraged Elia to continue applying these management principles, this time without any external funding. This new project is being carried out at Elia Group level, i.e. ecological corridors are being created in both Belgium and Germany. In both cases, the aim is to ecologically manage 90% of our woodland corridors by 2030. In Belgium, this corresponds to 1,150 hectares of areas managed to promote biodiversity. We have already managed more than 800 hectares to date.

*"We want to integrate our lines as well as possible into their environment. This programme, which began more than 10 years ago, has taken on even greater dimensions through our ActNow sustainability program. These actions, which aim to put into place innovative practices for the management of these green corridors, are an important part of this program. The project also helps to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity in these corridors among different groups of people. The very positive results encourage us to keep doing what we are doing."*

**Pierre-Henri D'haene, Head of Sustainability at Elia Group**

*"There were many challenges to overcome during the LIFE project, but the results obtained in our 10-year summary report are very encouraging, often exceeding expectations. They prove that we are heading in the right direction. The establishment and multiplication of these landscaped areas beneath the lines is working well and we can now say that biodiversity is expanding very successfully. Habitat connectivity has improved, heritage species are appearing, rare plants are flowering or spreading, and invasive species are being curbed. We are therefore very pleased to be able to share this experience on a European scale thanks to the RGI initiative."*

**G rard Jadoul, Elia-RTE project coordinator, Ecofirst**

### Positive results after 10 years encourage us to continue our efforts

Ecofirst, the company responsible for implementing these projects in Belgium, has carried out an analysis of the value of these ecological corridors in terms of biodiversity: *"Creating green corridors under overhead lines – Biological evolution, 10 years-after report"*. This analysis comes 10 years after the first ecological improvements were made. The biological inventories carried out throughout this period and included in this summary report make it possible to analyse the data in 3 areas: sites, habitats and species.

With regard to **the sites**:

- Restoration actions were successful at 70% of the sites developed during the Elia LIFE project. For the more recent developments under the *Ecological corridors* programme, the figures will have to be adjusted, as most of them are still too recent to be assessed;
- There is a genuine biological benefit in 82% of the LIFE sites. The same observation as above applies to the more recent *Ecological corridors* projects;
- There has been a clear increase in the number and diversity of species in most LIFE Elia sites.

As far as **habitats** are concerned, the evaluation shows that the habitats restored in the forest corridors managed by Elia make a significant contribution towards increasing the Natura 2000 network. For certain types of habitat, particularly in open areas, the corridors managed by Elia represent up to 10% of the surface area of Natura 2000 zones of this type in Belgium.

Finally, with regard to **the species**:

The biodiversity of the forest corridors surrounding Elia's infrastructure is often high. The richness and rarity of the species observed underline the important role that the electricity network can play in nature conservation in Belgium. In particular, the biological inventories have demonstrated the presence of:

- 11 species on the Walloon red list of threatened species;
- 14 bird species targeted by Natura 2000 directives;
- 8 different species of amphibians, 4 reptile species, 67 bird species, 38 dragonfly species and 16 bat species;



There is also a record number of 151 plant species and 43 butterfly species on a single site.

More information on the report? [\(EN\) Creating green corridors under overhead lines – Biological evolution, 10 years-after report | Ecofirst](#)

More information on the Elia LIFE project? [Life Elia · Life Elia \(life-elia.eu\)](#)

More information on our ActNow program? [Elia Group presents its action plan for sustainability: ACT NOW](#)

## About Elia Group

### One of Europe's top five TSOs

Elia Group is a key player in electricity transmission. We ensure that production and consumption are balanced around the clock, supplying 30 million end users with electricity. Through our subsidiaries in Belgium (Elia) and the north and east of Germany (50Hertz), we operate 19,192 km of high-voltage connections, meaning that Elia Group is one of Europe's top 5 transmission system operators. With a reliability level of 99.99%, we provide society with a robust power grid, which is important for socioeconomic prosperity. We also aspire to be a catalyst for a successful energy transition, helping to establish a reliable, sustainable and affordable energy system.

### We are making the energy transition happen

By expanding international high-voltage connections and incorporating ever-increasing amounts of renewable energy into our grid, we are promoting both the integration of the European energy market and the decarbonisation of society. We also continuously optimise our operational systems and develop new market products so that new technologies and market parties can access our grid, thus further facilitating the energy transition.

### In the interest of society

As a key player in the energy system, Elia Group is committed to working in the interest of society. We are responding to the rapid increase in renewable energy by constantly adapting our transmission grid. We also ensure that investments are made on time and within budget, with a maximum focus on safety. In carrying out our projects, we manage stakeholders proactively by establishing two-way communication channels between all relevant parties very early on in the development process. We also offer our expertise to different players across the sector in order to build the energy system of the future.

### International focus

In addition to its activities as a transmission system operator, Elia Group provides various consulting services to international customers via its subsidiary Elia Grid International. Recently, Elia Group launched new non-regulated activities such as re.alto, the leading European market platform for the exchange of energy-related data via standardised APIs in the energy field, and WindGrid, a subsidiary that will continue to develop Elia Group's activities abroad, contributing to the expansion of offshore electricity grids in Europe and beyond.

Elia Group operates under the legal entity Elia Group, a listed company whose core shareholder is the municipal holding company Publi-T.

[eliagroup.eu](http://eliagroup.eu)

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