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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: Outcome of the 34th meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) (Strasbourg, 2-5 December 2014)

- Information from the Presidency and the Commission

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note by the Presidency and the Commission on the above subject.

**Outcome of the 34th meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)
(Strasbourg, 2-5 December 2014)**

- Information from the Presidency and the Commission -

The 34th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention ran easily and ended up successfully. The Parties to the Bern Convention held constructive and fruitful discussions which led to the adoption of decisions that will contribute to the conservation of wild flora and fauna in their natural habitats, and enhance and promote European co-operation in that field.

The Standing Committee addressed a number of issues, including:

- Reporting by the EU and its Member States and Launch of the On-line Reporting System
- Invasive Alien Species
- Conservation of birds, including Minimising Illegal killing of birds
- Conservation of other threatened Species
- Biodiversity and Climate change
- Protected areas and Ecological networks and the award "European Diploma for Protected Areas" for managing such areas in an exemplary way
- International coordination with other MEAs and organisations
- Implementation of the CBD Strategic Plan: the contribution of the Bern Convention
- Programme of Activities for 2015
- Election of Chair, Vice-Chair and Bureau members.

The Standing Committee welcomed the setting up of the Bern Convention Online Reporting System (ORS) as a concrete step towards streamlining national reporting to biodiversity related Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) and the promotion of synergies at the international level, following the adoption of the system also by the CNS, the AEWA, the CITES and the Ramsar Convention.

The Standing Committee took note of the communication of the European Union concerning the future launch of a new EU reporting tool designed to allow EU Member States to provide one single and full report that includes all derogations relevant for their reporting obligations to the European Commission and to the Bern Convention. The reporting tool is now in a testing phase, and a comprehensive assessment of the proper fulfillment of the obligation arising under Article 9 of the Bern Convention can only be done and transmitted to the Secretariat once the final version of the tool is available.

Various recommendations were discussed and adopted, particularly addressing:

- invasive alien species: adoption of a voluntary Code of conduct on recreational fishing and IAS
- biodiversity and climate change: an expert group will develop a new work plan;
- conservation of birds, taking in account the international attention to bird-crimes and the successful cooperation with other concerned MEAs, in particular the CMS, AEWA, the Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia, Interpol, Birdlife International, FACE and IUCN. A recommendation on Criteria to set-up national policing/investigation priorities to tackle illegal killing of birds was issued.

Notably a recommendation on hybridization between wild wolves and domestic dogs was issued, with the aim to promote adequate national measures to monitor, prevent and mitigate hybridization and to avoid intentional and accidental killing of wolves by recommending that only bodies authorized by the government are allowed to remove hybrids.

The Committee adopted additional measures on the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest, further harmonising the tools and methodologies used both under the Emerald and Natura 2000 network. The Committee agreed to the official nomination of 203 areas Candidate Emerald sites in various Eastern European Parties. The Committee further welcomed the progress in the preparation of the forthcoming celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma, as an important opportunity for the re-launch of the award and its importance to reaffirm the value of conservation of the biological, geological, landscape and cultural diversity at the international, national and local levels.

The Committee considered various complaints and (possible) case files:

- In the context of various complaints relating to badgers, the Committee recalled that animal welfare concerns generally fall out of the scope of the Bern Convention;
- The Committee decided to keep the following cases open:
 - o 2004/1 – Ukraine: building of navigable waterway in the Bystroe Estuary (Danube delta). The file was kept open in view of further trilateral meetings between Ukraine, Moldova and Romania;
 - o 1995/6 – Cyprus: Akamas Peninsula – turtles;
 - o 2004/2 – Bulgaria: wind farms in Balchik and Kaliakra – Via Pontica;
 - o 2007/1 – Italy: Eradication and trade of the American grey squirrel; Italy explained the progress made in the eradication programme which is being implemented;
 - o 2012/9 – Turkey: Presumed degradation of turtle nesting beaches in Fethiye and Patara SPs: the next Standing Committee may consider recommendations and/or an on-the-site appraisal.
- The Committee kept as a possible file:
 - o 2011/4 – Turkey: threat to the Mediterranean monk seal: the Bureau was mandated to prepare proposals and recommendations for the next Standing Committee;
 - o 2012/3 – possible spread of the American mink in Poland, inter alia in view of ongoing work on the list of IAS to be established by the EU under the new Regulation on IAS;
 - o 2013/8: alleged abusive eradication of European badgers in France, where France was asked to report on derogations under Article 9.
- The Committee decided to provide for mediation between the complainant and Lithuania concerning case file 2013/5 the Lithuanian-Polish powerline. Procedures for mediation had been agreed in the previous Standing Committee and this will be the first case where they are applied.
- The Committee opened a new case file concerning 2013/1: Hydropower development within the territory of the Mavrovo National Park in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
- The Committee adopted a recommendation with respect to case 2010/5 – Greece: threats to marine turtles in Thines Kiparissias;

- The Committee examined follow-up to the following recommendations:
 - Nr 95 (2002) on the conservation of marine turtles in Kazanlı beach, Turkey, inviting Turkey to continue its efforts in particular for urgently addressing the issues of pollution and erosion. During the next Standing Committee meeting, an on-the-spot appraisal may be discussed if appropriate;
 - Nr 144 (2009) on wind park Smoela, Norway and other wind farm developments, and its impacts on bird populations, including the white footed eagle;
 - Nr 96 (2002) on conservation of natural habitats and wildlife especially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland. The Committee congratulated Iceland with accepting to undergo an AEWA Implementation Review Process (which is, however, subject to the availability of resources);
 - Nr 110 (2004) on minimising the adverse effects of power lines on birds. The Committee decided to re-conduct the system of biennial reporting. The next discussion would be in the Standing Committee in 2016;
 - Nr 25 (1991) on the conservation of natural areas outside protected areas proper. A new reporting request should result in an analysis of replies by the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks in 2015.

As regards the international coordination with other MEAs and organisations, the Committee took note of the many coordination activities carried out to improve synergies and welcomed the supporting statements of the UNEP/AEWA and the UNEP/EUROBATS. The Committee also welcomed the close cooperation with the CBD.

The Standing Committee adopted the activities and budget for 2015 and thanked the Belgian Presidency of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, Italy, Slovenia, Switzerland and SEO Birdlife (Spain) for offering to host Bern Convention's meetings and events next year.

Moreover, the Committee, in this meeting elected Mr Øystein Størkersen (Norway), as Chair, Ms Jana Durkošová (Slovak Republic) as Vice-Chair, Mr Jan Plesník (Czech Republic), Mrs Hasnik Ghalachyan (Armenia), and Mr Felix Zaharia (Romania) as Bureau members.

The Presidency and the Commission would like to thank all delegates and experts, participating and actively engaging in preparation of the EU positions for this meeting, for their constructive collaboration and support which resulted in fruitful discussions and delivering common decisions that will contribute to biodiversity protection and conservation.

