

Strasbourg, 21 October 2015
[tpvs26e_2014.docx]

T-PVS (2015) 26

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

35th meeting
Strasbourg, 1-4 December 2015

Meeting of the Bureau

Strasbourg, 14-15 September 2015

MEETING REPORT

*Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The meeting was opened on 14 September 2015 by the Chair of the Standing Committee to the Convention, Mr Øystein Størkersen. The Chair welcomed the Bureau members and the Secretariat, and noted the high number of events organised during the first semester, as well as the numerous meetings and on-the-spot visits still planned to take place in the last quarter.

The Chair noted that this is an indicator of both the relevance of the Convention and of the financial support of Parties. He however recognised that the implementation of the 2015 Programme of Activities has been a real challenge in terms of workload for the members of the tiny Secretariat of the Convention. He concluded his introductory remarks by praising their work and congratulating them for the very good results so far obtained.

Finally, the Chair introduced the draft agenda which was adopted without amendments (see appendix 1).

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2015 PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES

*[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 6 – Summary table of reporting]
[T-PVS (2015) 6 - Report of the 1st meeting of the Bureau]*

Ms d'Alessandro welcomed the Chair and the Bureau members, and presented Ms Christina Baglai, who joined the Biodiversity Unit in September.

Furthermore, Ms d'Alessandro presented the main activities carried out or planned between April and December 2015 for the implementation of the Convention's Programme.

Apart from the meetings of the Groups of Experts, Ms d'Alessandro emphasised on the co-organisation of a number of events related to the conservation of specific species (marine turtles, European bison, large carnivores, invertebrates and bryophytes); on the on-the spot appraisals organised within the framework of the European Diploma for Protected Areas (EDPA), as well as on those planned as a follow-up to complaints; and on the strong efforts devoted to improving communication in order to raise support, awareness, and partnership. In this frame, the Secretariat informed about the launch of the Facebook Page of the Bern Convention, in conjunction with the 50th Anniversary of the EDPA. Under a Council of Europe peer-to-peer mentoring programme the Secretariat received training on communication on social media and runs the page without the help of consultants. A first analysis of the statistics related to the outreach of the page has delivered very good results, showing that several posts reached over a thousand people.

The good experience of the Facebook page has led the Secretariat to think about a wider communication strategy which, so far, materialised in an increase of the number of media advisories, some written contributions to the newsletters or brochures by other partners, the publication of a couple of documents prepared under the Convention in legal or scientific magazines, and the publications of a new brochure for the Emerald Network. In the frame of the communication strategy, the Secretariat has recently launched a call for tender for the production of the technical tools for its implementation.

The Chair thanked the Secretariat for the presentation as well as for the information related to the initiatives on communication. He further noted the very good synergies established – including through communication – with other biodiversity-related agreements, stressing that the Convention has promoted several examples of good and effective collaboration.

Moreover, the Bureau members referred to the workload of the Secretariat, also in light with the most recent developments in the field of the Emerald Network, and evoked the need to possibly strengthen the Biodiversity Unit for the next biennium with at least one more person who would be in charge of the management of the network. The Secretariat explained that – according to the Council of Europe's policies and budget, this would only be possible if Parties ensure the sustainable funding of a two-year A grade position through voluntary contributions granted in advance.

2.1 Group of Specialists on the European Diploma of Protected Areas: report of the meeting and celebration of the 50th Anniversary

*[T-PVS/DE (2015) 9 – Report of the meeting of the Group of Specialists on European Diploma of Protected Areas]
[Pisa Declaration]*

[T-PVS (2015) 15 - Draft recommendation on the Future of the European Diploma for Protected Areas]

[T-PVS/DE (2015) 13 - Progress report on the Fulfilment of the Resolution of the Committee of Ministers (2012)19 on the European Diploma to the Poloniny National Park]

[T-PVS/DE (2015) 11 – Adopted resolutions concerning the European Diploma of Protected Areas in 2015]

The Secretariat recapped the outcomes of the last meeting of the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas, which took place in Strasbourg on 13 March 2015. As anticipated, the two draft Resolutions forwarded to the Committee of Ministers were adopted on 3 June 2015 and the Diploma was awarded to the Vashlovani Protected Areas in Georgia and renewed to the Weerribben-Wieden Nature Reserve in the Netherlands.

Two opinions were also forwarded by the Group of Specialists to the Bureau for its first meeting in 2015, both following exceptional on-the-spot appraisals. The first concerned a joint visit to the Podyji and Thayatal National Parks, respectively in the Czech Republic and Austria. The second appraisal concerned the Bayerischer Wald National Park in Germany. Following the agreement of the Bureau, these two opinions and draft Recommendations are now placed on the draft agenda of next Standing Committee meeting.

Besides, another exceptional on-the-spot appraisal is planned to take place in the Białowieża National Park in Poland on 18 September 2015. The renewal of the Diploma to this area was suspended in 2007, while waiting for the adoption of the Management Plan. Following the adoption of the latter at the beginning of 2015, the Group of Specialist decided to organise a fresh appraisal of the area ahead of a decision on the possible renewal of the Diploma, to be taken in 2016.

Eventually, the Secretariat informed that no new applications for the European Diploma were received in 2015, although some informal contacts were already established between the Secretariat and some countries.

Besides, the Secretariat informed on the developments related to the Poloniny National Park (Slovak Republic). Further to the request of the Bureau, the Slovak authorities sent a written report with information on the progress achieved after the necessary changes of legislation towards the adoption of the Management Plan, the proposed designation of a new nature reserve, and improvements of forests' management of the area. The Secretariat further informed that, at the end of August, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, Mr Ján Ilavský, accompanied by the Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to the Council of Europe, paid a visit to the Director General for Democracy (DGII) at the Council of Europe. Their visit was aimed at personally informing the General Director on the progress achieved since the meeting of the Group of Specialists and, more specifically, on the calendar for the final adoption of the Plan, which is expected to be concluded early 2016 at the latest.

In addition, the State Secretary Ilavský informed the Director General on the actions implemented in relation to the proposed extension of the World Heritage Site covering the Slovak part of the Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians (partly in the Poloniny Park) and the Ancient Beech Forests of Germany. An advisory mission had been planned to the Slovak Republic on 16 September, followed by a Seminar entitled "Benefits from international protected areas for the Zemplín Region". The State Secretary invited the Council of Europe to attend both events. Due to the late notification of the invitation, the Secretariat appointed Mr Robert Brunner as the independent expert that would attend on behalf of the Bern Convention. Mr Brunner will report to the next Standing Committee meeting.

The Secretariat further informed on the results of the celebratory event marking the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma, which took place at the Regional Park Migliarino, San Rossore, Massaciuccoli in the form of a Workshop on "Protected areas in Europe: the next 50 years". The event attracted more than 100 participants from 26 countries and proved to be a very good forum for reinforcing the links among the managers of the protected areas holding the award. The participants requested – among others - that such meetings on networking, knowledge sharing, and best practice exchanges are organised more often. The conclusions on the future of protected areas in an

interconnected world are presented in the so-called “Pisa Declaration”, to be submitted to the Standing Committee for information. A more specific draft Recommendation will also be forwarded for examination and possible adoption.

In addition, the Secretariat further mentioned some other several celebratory events organised at national level by the area’s administrations, sometimes in cooperation with the national authorities.

Finally, the Secretariat reminded that at the end of 2015 the composition of the Group of Specialists should change, in line with the four-year rotation principle for membership. Taking into account the membership during the past 10 years, the Secretariat proposed that Sweden, Italy and Hungary are invited to designate new members. Mr Jan-Willem Sneep, current member of the Group, was proposed for the now vacant position of Chair.

The Chair thanked the Secretariat for the report and the good results achieved under the EDPA this year. He further greeted Mr Peter Skoberne for his dedication and expertise as Chair of the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma over the past two years and, in particular, for his contribution to the success of several celebratory events on the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma. Besides, the Chair thanked the two other outgoing members of the Group of Specialists, from Estonia and Turkey, for their hard work and support to the European Diploma’s mechanism over the past four years.

Ms Jana Durkošová presented the report of the Slovak authorities on the progress made in the period between the two Bureau meetings of 2015, focussing on the implementation of the conditions accompanying the last renewal of the European Diploma to Poloniny National Park. She emphasised on the achievement of two of the seven conditions attached to the renewal, concerning (1) the signature of a trilateral agreement between the bodies directly responsible for managing the bordering protected areas in Poland, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine; and (2) the implementation of a ban on wolf shooting in the area of the national park and its surroundings. She further stressed the progress made in the preparation of the management plan for the area and of the new nature reserve, both under consultation with stakeholders, before the presentation for cross-sector discussions. She also informed on the steps taken towards a more nature-friendly management of the forest’s areas of the park, on consultations on hunting and on activities for large carnivores.

Eventually, Ms Durkošová expressed the appeal of the authorities of the Slovak Republic to the Bureau to support their efforts in finding the best possible solution for the management of the area in the nearest future, building on the positive momentum gained in the past year.

Mr Jan Plesnik insisted on the uniqueness of the area in Europe and while welcoming the positive progress achieved over the last year, he reminded that unfortunately all these efforts are deployed for protecting the last wild areas in the park, where problems started almost twenty years ago.

The Chair also thanked the Slovak authorities for the detailed report, underlying that the report’s understanding would greatly improve through the addition of some maps, as well as through clarifications on the levels of protection granted to the area. He further welcomed the progress and increased political attention given to the issue, but reminded that the progress needs to finally and rapidly translate into tangible results and on the adoption of the area’s management plan.

DECISION: The Bureau welcomed the good outcomes of the work of the Group of Specialists in 2015 and appreciated the success of all celebratory events marking the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma. The Bureau further thanked the outgoing members and Chair of the Group of Specialists for their hard work and contribution to the visibility of the European Diploma as well as its successful implementation as a monitoring mechanism over the past four years.

On the issue of the Poloniny National Park, the Bureau acknowledged the progress achieved since its last meeting by the responsible authorities, emphasising on the preparation of the management plan and on the increased political relevance given to this issue. It further thanked the Slovak authorities for their written report, but requested that an improved version which includes maps of the area is prepared for the Standing Committee meeting. The Slovak authorities are invited to submit their revised report by 10th November.

Finally, the Bureau agreed with the proposed new composition of the Group of Specialists, including the proposed new Chair and instructed the Secretariat to contact the relevant authorities.

2.2 Outcomes of the meeting of the ad hoc Select Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change

[T-PVS (2015) 8 – Report of the meeting]

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 16 - Climate change and biodiversity conservation: information document]

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 25 – Draft work-plan]

The Secretariat informed about the outcomes of the meeting of the ad hoc Select Group of Expert which took place in Rome in April 2015, at the invitation of Italian authorities. This was a restricted Group of Parties with the mandate of deciding on priorities for the future work on biodiversity and climate change under the Convention. Nine Parties volunteered to be part of this work: Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Union, France, Italy, Norway, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Switzerland.

Some excellent speakers presented a list of topics that the Group had to examine in light the pros and cons of having those included in the work-plan, their feasibility, their interest, their added value. The whole was framed by an excellent key-note speech by Prof. Brian Huntley, who also accepted to prepare the draft work-plan elaborated following the discussion, for examination by the Standing Committee.

The proposals of the Select Group for future work are the following objectives:

- Boosting, as a matter of urgency, the implementation of existing guidance at national level but with a global perspective. In particular, Parties should implement practical actions that will facilitate the ability of species to respond to climatic change; sharing of best practice on this aspect is strongly recommended and Parties are invited to report on their success;
- Assessing (or re-assessing) species vulnerability, so to ensure that the species at higher risk are prioritised. The situation of seasonally migrant species should be also carefully assessed, in cooperation with the CMS. Moreover, the Group should assess the importance of European biodiversity in relation to the capacity of European ecosystems to adapt to climate change;
- Completing the assessments of the vulnerability to climate change of all Bern Conventions species. The Group should develop a common monitoring scheme for the monitoring of targeted species and of the effectiveness of conservation measures;
- Ensuring the adaptive management of protected areas. The management plans for such areas should take into account, and respond to, the expected consequences of climate change, and the need to facilitate the responses of species. This should also target the management of Emerald and EDPA sites;
- Addressing Arctic biodiversity and climate change, by following and supporting the work of the Arctic Council and transpose, under the framework of the Convention, the necessary recommendations for its Contracting Parties.

- Ensuring effective communication on climate change challenges and opportunities, by developing a manual to help delegates of Contracting Parties to promote their national policies on climate change with particular focus on biodiversity and the opportunities and benefits afforded also with Emerald network sites.

Pending the availability of resources, the Convention should also promote research to underpin the development of more permeable landscapes, thus facilitating species' range shifts. Another field for promoting research would be the analysis of the impact of climate change adaptation and mitigation measures on biodiversity.

The Chair thanked the experts that participated in the work of the Select Group, as well as the speakers for their contribution. He then invited the Bureau members to discuss the draft work-plan before its submission to the Standing Committee. Mr Jan Plesnik suggested that a media advisory on the contribution of the Bern Convention to biodiversity and climate change is issued prior to UNFCCC CoP 21.

DECISION: The Bureau thanked Italian authorities for the hosting of the meeting of the Select Group of Experts, as well as the countries that appointed delegates for this work.

Moreover, the Bureau analysed and slightly amended the draft work-plan on climate change and biodiversity, and decided to submit it to the Standing Committee for endorsement.

2.3 Outcomes of the 11th meeting of the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species

[T-PVS (2015) 10 – Report of the meeting of the Group of Experts]

[TPVS (2015) 7 – Report of the Workshop on the “Feral ungulates and their impact on Island Biodiversity in the Mediterranean and Macaronesian Regions”, La Gomera (Spain), 23-24.03.2015]

[TPVS (2015) 5 - Draft recommendation on the control of feral ungulates in islands of the Mediterranean and Macaronesian Regions]

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 1 - European Code of Conduct on Plantation Forestry and IAS]

[T-PVS (2015) 12 – Draft recommendation on the European Code of Conduct on Plantation Forestry and IAS]

[TPVS/Inf (2015) 14 - The Bern Convention and the EU Regulation 1143/2014 on the Prevention and Management of the Introduction and Spread of Invasive Alien Species]

[T-PVS (2015) 11 - Draft recommendation on action to promote and complement the implementation of EU Regulation 1143/2014 on IAS]

The Secretariat presented the outcomes of the 11th meeting of the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species (IAS), held in the Triglav National Park (Slovenia), on 4 and 5 June 2015.

The Group checked the implementation by Parties of the European Strategy on IAS adopted by the Standing Committee in 2004. 14 States had presented written reports. Reports were also submitted by the IUCN (ISSG), the European Commission, the EPPO and NOBANIS. The analysis of these reports shows that there is indeed progress in how States and international organisations are dealing with IAS.

A good part of the meeting had been devoted to the analysis of the possible implications for the Convention of the new EU Regulation on IAS. Mr Arie Trouwborst, consultant, presented a report on this topic and the Group proposed to forward it to the Standing Committee, together with a draft recommendation on action to promote and complement the implementation of EU Regulation 1143/2014 on Invasive Alien Species outside EU borders.

In the same context, the Group examined guidance for governments on IAS pathways.

The Group further examined a new draft “Code of Conduct on Plantation Forests and IAS”, to be submitted to the Standing Committee for endorsement, together with a draft recommendation.

Another preliminary draft code of conduct (on recreational boating and IAS) was presented to the Group, before being further elaborated.

Besides, the Group was informed about a seminar on feral ungulates organised by the Convention in March 2015. This seminar made proposals that will be submitted to the Standing Committee in the form of a draft recommendation on the control of feral ungulates in islands of the Mediterranean and Macaronesian regions.

The Group agreed on its priorities for future work, identifying the following fields for action: Aquaculture and IAS; Canals and IAS; Biofuels and IAS; Infrastructure developments and IAS; Commercial ports and IAS; Tourism and IAS; Composting and IAS; Internet trade/e-commerce of IAS (with a view to improve enforcement and fight against this kind of wildlife crimes).

Moreover, the Group thought it was important to start or continue work on other issues:

- Identification of species for risk assessment (focusing on “door-knock species”);
- Management of pathways;
- Technical guidance for management of IAS;
- Eradication of the ruddy duck;
- Eradication of IAS on islands (A 1-day seminar could be organised back to back to the next meeting in 2017).

2.4 Outcomes of the 8th meeting of the Group of Experts on Amphibians and Reptiles

[T-PVS (2015) 13 – Meeting report]

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 15 - Demography of marine turtles nesting in the Mediterranean Sea]

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 20 - Priorities for conservation of amphibians and reptiles in Europe]

[T-PVS (2015) 9 – Draft recommendation on the prevention and control of the Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans chytrid fungus]

The Secretariat presented the outcomes of the 8th meeting of the Group of Experts on Amphibians and Reptiles, which took place in July in the city of Bern, Switzerland. The Secretariat pointed out the excellent co-operation, organisation and hospitality by Swiss national authorities and the KARCH.

The Secretariat considered that there was a good representation of Parties for a “dormant Group” which had not been convened for the past 8 years. The average rate of reporting was also good compared to the one of other Groups. Nevertheless, the dynamic of the Group has been a bit difficult to build because of the inaction of the past years.

As for the Select Group on Climate Change, the high quality of the speakers played a very important role in the discussions, and participants examined a list of possible priorities for future work, agreeing to propose some of them to the Standing Committee for consideration. These are:

- Monitoring and surveillance of herpetofauna across the Bern Convention area, taking into account that the conservation status of amphibians and reptiles is not improving;
- Reconducting the monitoring of implementation of relevant past recommendations and Action Plans, calling on the Standing Committee to encourage Parties with good experiences to share them through reporting;
- Identifying, in view of their designation, some Important Herpetofauna Areas (IHA) within the existing Natura 2000 and Emerald (including candidate) sites and, where this is not possible, also outside them. The aim is to protect herpetofauna through these networks and also raise the profile of these species;
- Elaborating or endorsing a set of basic principles common to all Parties to avoid or reduce the impact of transport defragmentation in Europe. Some very good guidance exists in German and their translation and adoption through a recommendation might be sufficient;
- Reviewing the impact of alien predators on amphibian and reptiles;
- Where possible and if the expertise is available within the Group of Experts, addressing pending taxonomic issues.

Besides, the Secretariat informed that the core of the discussions was the state of knowledge on the spread of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* (BS) chytrid fungus, a topic which was introduced by a brilliant talk by Prof. Frank Pasmans.

The Group agreed on a draft Recommendation to prevent and control the further spread of BS, and requested the Standing Committee to examine, adopt, and urgently implement the measures suggested in the document.

Finally, the Secretariat informed that the Group further requested that its meetings are convened on a more regular basis.

DECISION: The Bureau examined the draft Recommendation on the prevention and control of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* (BS) chytrid fungus and decided to submit it to the Standing Committee for analysis and possible adoption. The Bureau further expressed its support for the requests of the Group of Experts, and wished to extend this to the work of the Mediterranean Conferences on Marine Turtles.

2.5 Progress in the setting-up of the Emerald Network

[T-PVS/PA (2015) 6 – Mid-term review of progress achieved in the implementation of the Emerald Calendar (2011-2020)]

The Secretariat recalled that this year marks the mid-term of the implementation of the Emerald Network's Calendar (2011-2020). A report on the mid-term evaluation of the progress achieved has been prepared by the Secretariat with the view of being presented at the 7th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks, on 17-18 September 2015.

The overall evaluation shows very positive results in terms of area and site coverage, although developments vary greatly between the different countries involved. Today, the Emerald Network covers nearly 600,000 km², 3,000 fully adopted or candidate Emerald sites and an average of 11-12% of the national territories of the participating countries.

The adoption of the Calendar in 2010, in response to the adoption of the UN CBD Aichi targets, proves to be a catalyst for action at national level. In addition, the availability of funds provided to Contracting Parties (mainly through the Joint EU/CoE Project) and the coordination and support to the work at national level by the Secretariat are among the major triggers for reinforced commitment and results. The draft report on the mid-term progress in the implementation of the Emerald Calendar will be finalised after the meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks and sent to the Standing Committee so that it can endorse the measures suggested for the next steps.

Besides, the Secretariat noted that 2015 was also important for the Emerald Network biogeographical evaluation process. Three big evaluation Seminars have been planned, one of which took place in Tbilisi in May. The event was very successful, proving that the efforts in the last 5 years by the three South-Caucasus countries have given very positive results. However, although all three countries can be congratulated for the hard work, they still received home-works for improving the sufficiency of their respective Network. The main finding of the Seminar indicates that countries have been very efficient in selecting Emerald sites for animal species. The percentage of sufficiency and minor insufficiencies of the current Emerald sites' proposals for animal species is the following: 37.5% for Armenia, 58% for Azerbaijan: 58% and 46.7% for Georgia.

The percentage of sufficiency and minor insufficiencies of the current Emerald sites' proposals for the protection of habitats is much lower. It should however be stressed that during the meeting the discussions among habitats experts from the three countries were very rich. These discussions were necessary for ensuring shared understanding of the European habitats classification in the three countries. More field trips and scientific research are also needed for concluding the presence of some of the specific habitats to be protected through the Emerald Network in the South Caucasus.

The second Emerald biogeographical Seminar, to take place in Petrozavodsk on 28-30 September will target the Arctic and Boreal biogeographical regions. It will be the first ever biogeographical Seminar in Europe to target the Arctic region. The third one will take place in Minsk on 24-25 November and will target only bird species in four countries (the Russian Federation, Belarus, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova).

The Secretariat noted that in 2016 the Emerald agenda and work programme will be once more extremely busy, with four evaluation Seminars planned, three for Eastern European countries and the Caucasus and one for Norway, in addition to the events planned in the frame of the EU/CoE Joint Programme for its final implementation year.

Eventually, the Secretariat informed about the outcomes of the cooperation with the EEA and its ETC/BD throughout 2015, which was as usual very fruitful. The launching of the Emerald Network's Software and the finalisation of the harmonisation exercise between the Resolutions No. 4 (1996) and No. 6 (1998) and the corresponding Annexes of the Habitats and Birds Directives were the most important achievements.

Mr Jan Plesnik, informed that the 6th edition of the Global Environment Outlook will have a dedicated section on Europe, in which both the Emerald and Natura 2000 Networks will be presented.

DECISION: The Bureau welcomed the mid-term review of the implementation of the Emerald Calendar and the important results accomplished since its adoption, underlying that the setting-up of the Network is one of the biggest achievements of the Convention in the past years. It further congratulated the Secretariat for its efforts in coordinating and supporting the work by Contracting Parties at national level. The Bureau further thanked the EEA and its ETC/BD for their continuous and vital support to the work of the Convention.

2.6 Meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks: state of preparation and expected results

[T-PVS/PA (2015)3 – Agenda of the meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks]

The Bureau received information on the main outcomes expected from the 7th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected areas and Ecological Networks, taking place on 17-18 September 2015. The meeting will be dedicated to the mid-term review of progress in the implementation of the Emerald Calendar (2011-2020) and to various technical issues such as the new release of the Emerald Network Software, the format of the first Emerald Network's reporting exercise as required by Resolution No. 8 (2012) or the taxonomic issues linked to the list of species and habitats that some Parties are considering to propose for addition to the lists of Resolutions No. 4 (1996) and No. 6 (1998).

Another important point on the agenda of the meeting is the follow-up of Recommendation No. 25 (1991) of the Standing Committee on the conservation of nature outside protected areas proper. A consultant, Dr Rob Jongman, was asked to prepare an analysis of the 16 national reports received in the last 2 years, using also additional sources of information such as the 4th and 5th national reports to the CBD by Parties which have not submitted a dedicated report on their implementation of Recommendation No. 25 (1991). The Secretariat informed that the Group of Experts will be called to decide on what follow-up should be given to this report and the result will reach the Standing Committee to the Convention at its 35th meeting.

DECISION: The Bureau appreciated the interesting draft agenda of the meeting and encouraged the Group of Experts to explore the utility of updating Recommendation No. 25 (1991) or alternatively of submitting a more general draft Recommendation which would stress the importance of protecting nature beyond protected areas, ensuring the connectivity of the larger landscape and thus supporting defragmentation efforts across Europe and building on the momentum created by the recently launched EU Green Infrastructure Strategy.

2.7 Conservation of birds: state of preparation of the forthcoming meeting of the Group of Experts

[Draft agenda of the meeting of the Group of Experts on the conservation of birds]

The Secretariat briefly presented the agenda of the forthcoming meeting of the Group of Experts on the conservation of birds, to take place in Strasbourg on 12-13 October.

The Secretariat emphasised on those items entailing a possible decision by the Standing Committee, namely the draft action plan for the conservation of the osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), the proposals for improving the enforcement of the legal aspects related to illegal killing of birds, and a number of pending complaints related to bird species, that had been forwarded to the Group by the Bureau following its first meeting.

Regarding the osprey, the Secretariat regretted to note that the second draft action plan is still not complete. For instance, it lacks information on the actions to be implemented by countries. On the contrary, work on illegal killing of birds has progressed steadily, with the finalisation of two pioneer documents regarding the analysis of gravity factors to be used on a preliminary basis by investigators, prosecutors, and also the judiciary, in order to evaluate wildlife crime in a similar way across all Parties' jurisdictions; and the sentencing principles, i.e. a set of basic standards able to fit across different ranges of jurisdictions, that should help judges in the evaluation of the offence for sentencing purposes. Both documents are the basis of the draft Recommendations that the Group of Experts will be requested to analyse in view of its possible submission to the Standing Committee.

Mr Jan Plesnik commented on the good results achieved by the Network of the Special Focal Points for illegal killing of birds, thanks also to the adoption of the comprehensive Tunis Action Plan. He suggested that a similar approach is taken to address the problem in countries that are not parties to the Convention, like for instance Egypt, Syria and Lebanon.

The Chair further praised the good co-operation with the CMS and invited the latter to coordinate with the Bern Convention prior to setting the dates of respective meetings.

DECISION No decisions were expected under this item.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BERN CONVENTION IN GREECE

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 22 – Draft Expert's report on the implementation of the Convention in Greece]

The Secretariat summarised the draft report prepared by Ms Virginia Murray on the implementation of the Bern Convention in Greece. The document was sent to the Bureau members by e-mail before the summer and the present second draft includes the amendments done following the comments received. However, the report does not include yet the information to be provided by the authorities since they haven't agreed yet on the dates of a possible meeting with the consultant in charge of the report.

The Secretariat raised the attention of the Bureau on the chapters regarding the particular issues and the conclusions, which unfortunately and despite some efforts, testify of some incoherence in the environmental policy of the country, and points out some weaknesses in the implementation of relevant Standing Committee Recommendations.

DECISION: The Bureau thanked the consultant for the work carried out so far and encouraged Greek authorities to facilitate a meeting with her as soon as possible. Moreover, the Bureau instructed the Secretariat to forward the final report to the Standing Committee for information. The consultant will be invited to present it at the 35th meeting.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION: FILES

*[T-PVS/Notes (2015) 3 – Summary of case files and complaints]
[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 4 – Register of Bern Convention's case-files]*

(Note: a detailed summary of each case-file is available in document TPVS/Notes (2014) 3 – Summary of Case files for Bureau meetings)

4.1 Specific Sites - Files open

➤ **2004/1: Ukraine: Proposed navigable waterway in the Bystroe Estuary (Danube delta)**

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 12 – Government report Ukraine]

At its last meeting the Bureau welcomed the information announcing the third meeting of the Joint Commission on 27-28 May 2015, and congratulated the Parties for their cooperation. It further asked Ukraine to forward to the Secretariat the report of that meeting, together with a list of agreed actions.

The report was submitted on 1st September and included an annex specifying the agreed next steps, which the Secretariat summarised. The Secretariat further informed that Ukraine had also submitted a national report on the implementation of Recommendation No. 111 (2004); however, there is still disagreement between Ukraine and Romania on the findings of the impact assessments and the potential impacts of the channel.

Finally, the Secretariat highlighted that another meeting of the Joint Commission should take place in Odessa, Ukraine, in October 2015.

DECISION: The Bureau congratulated the Parties and the Joint Commission for the excellent cooperation. The Bureau is aware that the case is not solved, but welcomed the coordination work carried out by the Joint Commission, and congratulated Ukraine for the hosting of the meeting and Romania for offering to sponsor the setting-up of a permanent Secretariat. Moreover, the Bureau noted with satisfaction the numerous issues where the three concerned Parties reached agreement, including for the conservation of Bern Convention's species.

In light of the latest information received, the Bureau would advise the Standing Committee to keep the case-file open as a way to ensure the continuation of a positive dynamic of cooperation and dialogue, and to entrust the Joint Commission with the task of acting as a supervisory and coordination body with a view of reinforcing the spirit of compromise and address still pending matters like for instance the evaluation of the EIA if needed.

The joint Commission could regularly report to the Standing Committee on progress towards a solution to this case.

➤ **2004/2: Bulgaria: Wind farms in Balchik and Kaliakra –Via Pontica**

*[T-PVS/Files (2015) 22 – Government report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 35 - Report of the NGO]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 28 –EU report]*

The Secretariat recalled that, following the decision of the Standing Committee, Bulgarian authorities were addressed in January 2015 with the request of a comprehensive report containing a detailed description of the actions taken in order to comply with the recommendations of the Standing Committee, and a timetable for the preparation of an Action Plan with the measures envisaged for ensuring the expedite and effective implementation of Recommendation No. 130 (2007).

The documents didn't reach the Secretariat by the first Bureau meeting thus the Bureau decided to assess them at a later stage through electronic exchanges. The Secretariat further regretted the absence of reply from the side of the complainant.

The report of the authorities was sent to the Bureau members in April 2015 and contained important information particularly on the modernisation of relevant legislation. However, it lacked of news regarding an Action Plan or its timetable. The Bureau decided to invite the authorities of Bulgaria to attend the meeting of the Group of Experts on the Conservation of Birds (12-13 October 2015) and to submit an updated report to its attention, with the views of the authorities on the preparation of an Action Plan for the effective implementation of Recommendation No. 130 (2007).

The Bureau further asked the Group of Experts to advise the Committee on a possible follow-up for this complaint.

In the absence of updated reports by both sides at the time of the second Bureau meeting, the Secretariat informed about the developments of the case pending before the European Court of Justice. The Advocate General released her opinion on 3 September, declaring the claims of the European Commission well-founded on the ground.

DECISION: The Bureau took note of the developments of the court case pending before the European Court of Justice and decided to leave the case-file open. Moreover, the Bureau acknowledged the information submitted by the authorities in their first report, but regretted the lack of a broader and comprehensive vision of the issues at stake, as well as the lack of specific planning for ensuring that the measures recommended by the Standing Committee are duly implemented. The Bureau emphasised on the fact that this complaint is pending since 11 years now, noting that little has been achieved in terms of progress. It therefore invited the authorities of Bulgaria to ensure that the report to be submitted to the Group of Experts on the conservation of birds focusses on the implementation of the recommended measures.

➤ **1995/6: Cyprus: Akamas peninsula**

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 25 – Government report]

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 26 - Report of the NGO]

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 28 – EU report]

The Secretariat recalled that the Bureau didn't discuss this complaint at its first meeting so to leave the country the necessary time for a comprehensive reporting. However, the Secretariat noted that the national report, submitted in June, is still too concise for being really informative. The report announces some delays in the procedure for the declaration of Polis-Gialia as SAC; it informs on the public consultations for the Akamas management plan, without giving details on their results; and mentions some of the results of the management of the rural area established outside the Akamas Natura site.

The Secretariat further informed about the reply of the complainant to this report, emphasising that this was not substantial either, being limited to the request of keeping pressures on the case also in light of the on-going EU infringement procedure.

Finally, the European Union informed that on 30 April 2015 it had issued a Reasoned Opinion against Cyprus as it considered that the breaches of the Habitats Directive concerning the tourist development in Limni area persisting.

DECISION: The Bureau decided to keep the case file open, regretting the lack of evidence and substantial information on compliance with the recommended actions and, more generally, on progress on this case that is on the table since twenty years now. The Bureau strongly invited the authorities of Cyprus to attend the next Standing Committee meeting and to present a report informing on the specific measures taken for the implementation of relevant recommendation, including a timeline for the actions that are still only planned, where appropriate.

➤ **2007/1: Italy: Eradication and trade of the American grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)**

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 31 – Government report]

The Secretariat summarised the content of the report submitted by the authorities, which presents an updated evaluation of the results so far achieved under the dedicated LIFE project.

According to the authorities, the legislative banning of the grey squirrel has been successfully implemented, since the CITES territorial services didn't find any cases of violation of the decree. Moreover, the authorities achieved the almost complete eradication of the grey squirrels in Genova Nervi and the surrounding areas, with only few animals being still trapped. According to the estimates, 3,000 hectares of forest areas are now adequate for recolonisation by the red squirrels. Still, the report is less precise on the results of the eradication of alien squirrels in Lombardy region, where only 4 macro areas (out of eight) were targeted by some action. The area is important because it is located only a few kilometres from Switzerland. Some activities are planned to avoid the colonisation of Northern Italy and Switzerland, but the report doesn't specify which ones. However, the authorities commit to sustain these after the end of the Life project. The same commitment applies to the Piedmont region.

DECISION: The Bureau acknowledged the good progress achieved by the Italian authorities, also thanks to the grants allocated by the European Union. The increase focus on concrete actions brings this case-file near to its end. However, the Bureau would be pleased to receive more specific information on the measures planned for the post-Life project and, more concretely, on how these are going to be sustained both in terms of human and financial resources. Moreover, the Bureau would like to get more detailed information on the results (numbers and figures) achieved for the eradication of the species in Piedmont and Lombardy.

Therefore the Bureau decided to leave the case-file open and invited the authorities of Italy to attend the next Standing Committee meeting and report on the requested information.

➤ **2010/5: Greece: threats to marine turtles in Thines Kiparissias**

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 30 – Government report]

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 29 - Report of the NGO]

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 28 – EU report]

The Secretariat summarised the report submitted by Greek authorities, informing on the implementation of a whole set of measures that would ensure the proper conservation of the protected site. The national report says that these measures are implemented in cooperation with the NGO Archelon, and that they include provisions to suspend the issuing of new building permissions and the prohibition of other works; restrictions for licensing of installations for bathers on the beaches for this summer; new procedures for the appropriate assessment of development plans and projects; and a new body of regulations for the whole SAC. However, the latter was not adopted because of procedural problems.

The report from the complainant is less positive, considering that none of the measures foreseen by law has been implemented in the practice, and informing that the draft Presidential Decree on the operation of the Kyparissia protected area was rejected by the Council of State because it proposed to declare the park only as regional park (not a national one) thus allowing additional activities to take place in the park. The same views are contained in the independent report that the Bureau discussed under agenda item 3.

Finally, the Secretariat informed that the European Union referred Greece to the European Court of Justice in relation to the similar case pending at EU level.

DECISION: The Bureau appreciated the response of the authorities and encouraged the continuation of such a co-operative spirit. However, the Bureau stressed that the efficiency of any legal framework is undermined if it is not followed by proper enforcement. Moreover, in situations like the Kyparissia's one, the setting-up of efficient control's mechanisms is indeed as crucial as the adoption of legal provisions. Therefore the Bureau decided to keep the file open in light of the still insufficient implementation of the recommended measures, and encouraged Greek authorities to continue their efforts with an additional focus on enforcement and control. The Bureau concluded by nothing that Kyparissias is among the most important sites for turtle nesting in the Mediterranean, and expressed its wishes to see the matters object of this complaint adequately addressed at the shortest delays.

ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISALS

➤ **2012/9: Presumed degradation of nesting beaches in Fethiye and Patara SPAs (Turkey)**

*[T-PVS/Files (2015) 18 – Government Report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 34 – Medasset report]*

The Secretariat informed about the preliminary results of the on-the-spot appraisal which took place in August at Fethiye and Patara SPAs, Turkey, noting that the report of the independent expert would be delivered by the end of September. The visit included day and night assessments of both Specially Protected Areas, as well as separate meetings with the authorities and with the stakeholders of both provinces. The mission was observed by scientists of the IUCN and the WWF. The findings are not positive, since the problems identified by the NGO were almost all confirmed on-the-spot, with a particularly severe situation at Fethiye SPA.

In the views of the Secretariat, among the main causes of the degradation of the sites, one should mention the insufficient legal protection of those SPAs which, since 2012, depend from the Ministry of Urbanisation and Tourism, including the suppression of the Agency for Specially Protected Areas; the lack of proper monitoring and controls of the beaches; the very strong anthropogenic pressures due to the excessive tourism development in Çalis (Fethiye); and the lack of environmental awareness and education of the local population. However, Patara is still a natural site that can be adequately protected. The situation in Fethiye is much serious and might raise problems of compliance with the Convention.

Finally, the Secretariat suggested that two draft Recommendations, one for each site, are prepared for the consideration of the Standing Committee.

DECISION: The Bureau regretted to hear about the preliminary findings of the on-the-spot appraisal, particularly in light of the outstanding biological value of the sites in question. Patara and Fethiye are undoubtedly part of both Turkish and European natural heritage and must receive adequate protection. The Bureau decided to keep the case-file open and instructed the Secretariat to forward the report of the independent expert to the Standing Committee, the Party and NGO as soon as it is ready. The Bureau further invited the authorities of Turkey to attend the Standing Committee meeting in order to present their views on the situation and the necessary proposals for its follow-up. Finally, the Bureau encouraged Turkey to reconsider the current status of the areas in order to ensure that they receive a much stricter legal protection.

➤ **File open - 2013/1: Hydro power development within the territory of Mavrovo National Park (“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”)**

The Secretariat recalled that the complaint was submitted in March 2013 to denounce a possible breach of the Convention by “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” with regards to the development of two big hydro-power projects (HPP) within the territory of the Mavrovo National Park.

In December 2014, the Standing Committee took note of the latest updates presented by the delegate of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and the complainant. Alerted by the fact that the area is a key biodiversity hotspot in Europe and a candidate Emerald site, and noting the projects’ implementation might be initiated soon, the Standing Committee decided to open a case file and instructed the Secretariat to seek the agreement of the Party for the organisation of an on-the-spot appraisal. The objective of the visit would be the collection of more information and data for the preparation of a draft recommendation to be submitted to the Standing Committee the next year.

The on-the-spot appraisal took place on 24-25 June 2015, with the excellent support of both the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning and the national electricity Company ELEM which is the promoter of one of the HPP projects. The Bern Convention’s mission was led by the independent expert, Mr Pierre Galland, a member of the Secretariat and three observers, from the IUCN, the IUCN’s World Commission on Protected Areas and the European Commission. The mission started in Skopje, where several meetings were held with the national authorities, the representatives of the ELEM Company, of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and of national NGOs, including the complainant. The second day was dedicated to a field visit of the two HPP localities, including the locality of one additional small HHP which had just been built.

The Secretariat informed that the report of the independent expert would be ready by the end of September/beginning of October and will be sent to the national authorities and complainant. Both will be invited to attend the Standing Committee meeting on 1-4 December 2015 to present their comments and observations.

A draft recommendation is equally under preparation and will be submitted to the Standing Committee for formal adoption in December 2015.

DECISION: The Bureau thanked the authorities of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” for their assistance during the on-the-spot appraisal and invited them to attend the next Standing Committee meeting. The Bureau further noted that the development of the energy project might raise problems of compliance with the Convention and a possible incompatibility with the status of the area, which is an important protected wilderness area that must be preserved for future generations. It therefore instructed the Secretariat to forward the report of the independent expert also to the investors and financing bodies, with a request to take it into consideration for a more holistic approach to the matter, in view of finding a balance between energy developments needs and nature protection.

The case-file will be forwarded to the Standing Committee as an open file.

MEDIATION

➤ **Possible File - 2013/5: Presumed impact of a construction of Overhead Power Line (OHL) in an environmentally sensitive area in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland**

The Secretariat informed on the state of preparation of the mediation visit to Lithuania, in the frame of the above mentioned complaint. Prof. Michael Usher accepted to act as Mediator in this case, and the authorities agreed to its nomination. The terms of reference for his work have been already sent to him. The visit will take place on 6-9 October 2015. The agenda includes bilateral meetings with each side, on-the-spot visits of the areas concerned by the OHL, including the Zuvintas Lake Biosphere Reserve, meetings with other concerned stakeholders, including the local authorities of Rudamina and Alytus districts, and a two-days proper mediation with both sides. The mediator will be accompanied by the Secretary of the Convention and by Ms Christina Baglai. The list of participants from both sides is being finalised, so as the on-the-ground rules.

The report of the Mediator will be delivered by the end of October. Ideally, it should contain the agreement reached during the mediation process.

DECISION: The Bureau thanked the Secretariat for the preparation of this first-ever mediation, and the authorities and the complainant for the spirit of co-operation. Moreover, the Bureau expressed its warm thanks to Prof. Usher for having accepted the task. The complaint will be forwarded to the Standing Committee as a possible file, together with a draft Recommendation for the monitoring of the agreement, where appropriate.

4.2 Possible file

➤ 2011/4: Turkey: threat to the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*)

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 10 – Government report]

The Secretariat recalled that the Bureau already assessed this complaint at its first meeting, in March 2015, in light of a timely national report, summarising the content of the recently adopted Action Plan for the Monk Seal, including some of the actions and deadlines foreseen for the next 5 years. However, the Bureau stressed again that the critical situation of the Mediterranean monk seal requires not only a very strong commitment but also immediate and urgent action in order to avoid further degradation of its conservation status. The Bureau recalled that this complaint raises two major issues: one is the conservation of the species at the national level; the other is the need to urgently mitigate the impact of the marine terminal on the population which was using Balikli cave in Mersin province. In light of these considerations, and in order to ensure that the Bureau receives all the elements necessary for a deep assessment of the complaint, the Secretariat asked Turkish authorities to forward a copy of the Action Plan adopted (including in Turkish language, in case the English translation was not available), and a report on the specific measures undertaken to mitigate the impact of the marine terminal on the population previously inhabiting or using the Balikli cave.

Moreover, the Secretariat approached the Barcelona Convention for their views on the adopted Action Plan, with an additional request of comments regarding a possible set of measures that could be suggested to Turkish authorities for stronger and more focussed results towards the conservation of the species.

Unfortunately the Secretariat regretted to inform that both its requests remained unanswered.

DECISION: The Bureau expressed deep concern for the lack of information from the Turkish government, and emphasised once more on the critical conservation status of the monk seal, which deserves urgent attention and action. Moreover, the Bureau was disappointed by the lack of reply of the Barcelona Convention on an issue which is surely of common concern.

The Bureau decided to keep the case as a possible file, and invited the Turkish authorities to attend the Standing Committee meeting and to submit a detailed report, answering the questions of the Secretariat.

➤ [2012/3: Poland: Possible spread of the American mink]

4.3 Complaints in stand-by

➤ 2006/1: France: Protection of the European green toad (*Bufo viridis*) in Alsace

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 32 – Government report]

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 27 – Report of the NGO]

The Secretariat reminded that this complaint concerns the threats to the few remaining habitats of the European green toad (*Bufo viridis*) in Alsace and was lodged in 2006.

After several delays in the preparation of a National Action Plan (NAP) for the conservation of the species, the French authorities informed on the possible adoption of the Plan in November 2014. At its meeting in September 2014, the Bureau decided to keep the complaint on stand-by until the Plan

is fully adopted and asked the French authorities to inform as soon as the official adoption takes place, and to report back to the Bureau in September 2015 on the results of the first implementation period.

As requested, the national authorities sent their report in July 2015 informing that the Ministry of Environment adopted the National Action Plan on 27 November 2015. They further described in details the measures put in place at both the national and regional levels, including conclusions of contracts for the implementation of the Plan at the regional levels (with the Association BUFO for the implementation of the Plan in Alsace).

The NGO *Sauvegarde Faune Sauvage* also submitted a short report in July 2015, informing on the actions put in place by the Association BUFO for the implementation of the regional part of the NAP in Alsace. The NGO requested that the case-file is not dismissed, out of fear that the implementation of some actions foreseen in the Plan might be difficult or even compromised in some localities of the region where derogation requests might be filed.

DECISION: The Bureau welcomed the official adoption of the NAP and stressed that this complaint is a good example of cooperation between authorities and complainants.

The Bureau took note of the concerns expressed by the NGO, but it decided nonetheless to dismiss the complaint in view of the positive actions undertaken by the authorities. The Bureau further invited French authorities to continue their efforts in the implementation of the NAP and to ensure that any derogation given to certain localities for their participation in the NAP is in line with the requirements of the Convention.

➤ **2014/6: Wind energy: Possible threats to an endangered natural habitat in Izmir (Turkey)**

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 23 – Government Report]

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 17 – Complainant report]

The Secretariat summarised the background of this complaint, and recalled that it denounces the presumed negative impact on a number of protected habitats and species of uncontrolled wind-energy developments in the Çeşme Peninsula.

When assessing this complaint in March 2015 the Bureau noted that it presents two major aspects: one concerns the common controversies surrounding wind-farm siting and falls out of the competence of the Convention; the second is the potentially uncontrolled wind-energy development, on which impact the complainant so far failed to clearly argue. The Bureau instructed the Secretariat to look for the opinion of nature conservation NGOs, in application of the precautionary approach.

The Secretariat informed that it had contacted the WWF-Turkey, which provided an informal reply because Cesme area does not fall under its direct ground of action for wind-energy issues. The NGO noted that the complainants have not proved yet a link between the windfarms developments and a specific impact on species and habitats. However, it also noted the need for a Strategic EIA about windfarms, in view of further potential developments. WWF's position is, in conclusion, that windfarm developments implemented after good quality EIA and social assessments are a good low carbon energy solution.

The Secretariat recalled that Turkey is not subject to the obligations of the Aarhus Convention.

DECISION: The Bureau thanked the WWF for its cooperation. It further noted again that the complainant has not yet based its complaint on sound scientific data. Once more in application of the precautionary approach, the Bureau decided to give another chance to the complainant for completing its file and to re-assess the case at its next meeting, in 2016. In case there is no evidence of a potential impact of these developments on the species and/or habitats protected under the Convention, the Bureau will close the complaint.

➤ **2014/1: Presumed risk of national extinction of badgers in Ireland**

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 1 – Complainant report]

The Secretariat summarised the background of this complaint, noting that it concerns a widespread Appendix III species, and that the only matter which is still being investigated in its frame is the information related to results of the monitoring carried out by the authorities since 2012. Unfortunately, the reporting request of the Secretariat remained unanswered.

DECISION: The Bureau stressed again that this complaint is still on the table only while waiting the reply of Irish authorities concerning their monitoring activities. Therefore the Bureau instructed the Secretariat to approach them, including through the Permanent Representation to the Council of Europe, in view of the smooth solution of the complaint.

➤ **2014/8: Presumed large-scale exploitation and marketing of protected marine shelled molluscs in Greece**

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 33 – Government Report]

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 19 – Complainant report]

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 28 – EU report]

The Secretariat summarised the latest information included in the national report addressed at the end of July, where the authorities confirmed that the species mentioned in the complaint are protected under both national law and the Habitats Directive and that, in fulfilment of the relevant obligations, the controlling authorities can impose deterring sanctions in case of infringements. The authorities are aware that illegal consumption still takes place, but disagree with the conclusions of the complainant regarding the extent of the problem. The Secretariat also forwarded the complaint to the European Union for comments, and the latter showed interest in the matter but requested more updated information from the side of the complainant as the studies he refers to date back to 2011.

DECISION: The Bureau thanked Greek authorities for their report and agreed that more updated information from the complainant might help clarifying the issues at stake. It therefore decided to keep the complaint on stand-by, instructing the Secretariat to liaise with the complainant and the European Union well ahead the first Bureau meeting in 2016. The Bureau further asked Greek authorities to provide the opinion of the CITES management authorities for trade in relation to possible infractions.

➤ **2014/9: Possible impact of haying performed in the steppe and forest-steppe reserves of Ukraine**

[T-PVS/Files (2015) 13 – Government Report]

The Secretariat recalled that the complaint was submitted in October 2014 by the NGO Kyiv Ecological and Cultural Centre, alleging a presumed breach of the Convention by Ukraine as a result of the destruction of habitats important for bird and reptile species due to haying practices. In March 2015, when the complaint was last assessed, the Bureau received satisfactory information from the Ukrainian authorities about a number of immediate measures taken to address the problems identified, including enhanced cooperation with the complainant. The Bureau decided to keep the complaint on stand-by in order to allow the complainant sufficient time to provide its views.

The Secretariat forwarded the decision of the Bureau to the complainant but its request for comments remained unanswered.

DECISION: As agreed at its previous meeting and in light of the lack of reaction from the complainant, the Bureau considered that there is no more evidence for presuming a breach of the Convention by Ukraine in the present case and thus decided to dismiss this complaint.

5. FOLLOW-UP OF PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ **Recommendation No. 25 (1991) on the conservation of natural areas outside protected areas proper**

*[T-PVS/Files (2015) 24 – Compilation of national reports]
[T-PVS/PA (2015) 8 – Report by the expert on the follow-up of Recommendation No. 25 (1991)]*

The Secretariat informed that the follow-up of Recommendation No. 25 (1991) was initiated by the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks back in 2013. In 2015, thanks to the more active reporting by Parties, a report analysing the measures implemented to comply with the Recommendation could be prepared. This assessment report will be presented at the upcoming meeting of the Group of Experts on 16-17 September. It comprises a final section with recommendations to Parties for improving their action on nature conservation outside protected areas proper. The follow-up to be given to this report is to be discussed by the Group of Experts itself.

Mr Jan Plesnik proposed that a new general draft Recommendation on the matter is prepared by the Group of Experts, stressing the need for strengthened action by Parties on issues such as ecological connectivity, defragmentation, green infrastructure and cross-sectoral cooperation for the benefit of nature conservation outside protected areas proper.

DECISION: The Bureau welcomed the assessment report on the implementation by Parties of Recommendation No. 25 (1991) and invited the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks to discuss the need and utility of preparing a new Draft Recommendation on the matter, taking into account the report's conclusions.

- **[File closed n° 1998/3: France: Habitats for the survival of the common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) in Alsace]**
- **[Recommendation No. 95 (2002) on the conservation of marine turtles in Kazanlı beach (Turkey)]**
- **Recommendation No. 96 (2002) on conservation of natural habitats and wildlife, especially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland**

The Secretariat recalled that last year BirdLife asked the Standing Committee to monitor the implementation of the above Recommendation in light of some governmental plans to increase planting targets in Iceland. The delegate of Iceland agreed, and informed about ongoing negotiations with the AEW Secretariat in view of the organisation of an IRP mission to the country. The Committee congratulated Iceland for accepting to undergo an AEW Implementation Review Process (IRP), and confirmed the readiness of the Bern Convention to join the on-the-spot visit. The Secretariat was asked to report on the findings of the visit to Iceland at the next Standing Committee meeting. The Committee also decided that, in the case the visit would not take place, Iceland would be invited to report on the implementation of the relevant Recommendation in 2016.

The Secretariat informed that the visit had to be postponed several times at the request of the authorities and that, very recently, the authorities further proposed some changes to its terms of reference, by excluding the participation of the Ramsar Convention and of the CAFF. In order to properly deal with these changes it was finally agreed to postpone the visit to 2016.

DECISION: the Bureau took note of the information presented and asked Iceland to report on the implementation of the relevant Recommendation on time for the next Bureau meeting. Moreover, the Bureau expressed again its support to the IRP visit and congratulated the authorities of Iceland for having accepted it, although it regretted the exclusion of the CAFF as this is a specialised body which might play a useful role in the advisory visit.

➤ **Recommendation No. 98 (2002) on the project to build a motorway through the Kresna Gorge (Bulgaria)**

The Secretariat informed about the alert received from eight NGOs from Bulgaria, regarding the implementation of Recommendation No. 98 (2002) on the project to build a motorway through the Kresna Gorge.

According to the NGOs, since 2014 the Bulgarian Government started preparing for the construction of the last section of the Struma motorway through the Kresna Gorge, by rejecting the “Tunnel” alternative chosen in 2008 and supported by the Recommendation in its points 3 and 4. The Secretariat reminded that the “Tunnel” option was agreed to reduce the harmful environmental impacts of the motorway project.

It now seems that the authorities are planning to use a “new” alternative to the tunnel, namely by upgrading the existing road to a 4-line highway.

Some Bureau members noted that the Kresna Gorge motorway could threaten herpetofauna, as well as a number of less mobile vertebrates, some of which are already threatened at both the EU and the Convention’s level. The Chair stressed that Kresna is an important site for biodiversity, with unique fauna and flora.

DECISION: The Bureau thanked the NGOs for the signal sent to the Convention and decided to place the issue on the agenda of the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee, under the agenda item on the follow-up of previous Recommendations. The Bulgarian Government will be requested to report on the measures put in place for complying with the provisions of Recommendation No. 98 (2002), and to inform on any changes to the agreed plans. Moreover, the Bureau instructed the Secretariat to liaise with the European Union on this matter.

6. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONVENTION

6.1 Follow-up to the CBD Strategic Plan for biodiversity

The Secretariat highlighted the activities organised under the 2015 Programme of Activities which have a direct link with the CBD Strategic Plan for biodiversity. An information document will be sent to the CBD Secretariat in view of the next SBSTTA meeting (Montreal, Canada, 1-6 November 2015).

The Bureau noted the need to continue the good coordination with the CBD and emphasized on the crucial contribution that the setting-up of the Emerald Network is giving to the achievement of Aichi Target 11 for the European continent. The Bureau suggested that the Secretariat organises a side-event on the Emerald Network at next CBD Conference of the Parties (December 2016, Mexico).

6.2 Relations with other MEAs

The Secretariat informed on the coordination with other MEAs, emphasising the good synergies built with the CMS on both climate change and illegal killing of birds’ issues, the essential support received by the EEA for the evaluation of the Emerald Network, the co-operation with the WCMC for the Online Reporting System, and the regular contacts for both co-operation and information sharing with the secretariats of the AEWI, BirdLife International, the Interpol, the FACE, the Large Carnivores Initiative, and the IUCN among others.

7. 35TH STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING

7.1 Draft Agenda

[T -PVS (2015) 1 – Draft Agenda]

The Secretariat introduced the draft Agenda for the forthcoming Standing Committee meeting, highlighting a few items that might change as a consequence of the forthcoming meetings of Groups of Experts.

DECISION: the Bureau validated the draft Agenda for submission to the Standing Committee.

7.2 Draft Programme of Activities 2016-2017

*[T-PVS/Notes (2015) 4 – Draft Calendar of meetings for 2016]
[T-PVS (2015) 14 - Draft Programme of Activities for 2016-2017]*

The Secretariat presented the draft Programme of Activities and budget for the forthcoming biennium. It stressed that the document includes a summary of the results achieved over the past two years, as a basis for planning future work. Regarding the budget, the Secretariat stressed that it was still premature to provide exact figures regarding the Ordinary Budget as the discussions on the future allocations were still ongoing at the level of the Committee of Ministers. However, the Secretariat emphasised on the commitment of the Director of Democratic Governance towards ensuring that the budget to be allocated to the Convention does not substantially decrease compared to previous years. Nevertheless, the Secretariat stressed that the Committee of Ministers has agreed to apply a zero nominal growth to the Council of Europe's budget.

Moreover, the Secretariat raised the attention on the draft calendar of meetings, which has been prepared taking into account the already planned meetings of the main partners so to ensure that there is no overlap.

Finally the Secretariat stressed that the Convention might financially support the participation of some Parties in the meetings of relevant Groups of Experts. However, it highlighted that some of the Parties which agreed in 2012 not to ask for their expenses to be reimbursed have now changed their position. The Secretariat said that their needs should be taken into account, provided that the participation of their appointed members is particularly relevant to the work of the concerned Groups of Experts.

DECISION: The Bureau validated the draft Programme of Activities and budget for the next biennium, noting that the figures on the Council of Europe's financial provision are still estimates. On the reimbursement of the expenses for the participation of delegates to experts' meetings, the Bureau decided to entrust the Secretariat – in consultation with the Bureau itself - with the decision of countries to be reimbursed, based on the interest shown by the Parties and on the relevance of the participation of their delegates to the work of the Groups of experts. The priority shall be however given to non-EU countries, countries with economies in transition, and countries which made voluntary contributions to the budget of the Convention.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Secretariat informed on the request of updates sent by MEDASSET concerning the possible organisation of a coordination meeting between the relevant authorities and the stakeholders on the situation of marine turtles at Episkopi (Cyprus, U.K. SBA). The Secretariat informed that it sent several requests to U.K. authorities, including suggesting a mediation procedure, but that all of them remained unanswered.

DECISION: the Bureau instructed the Secretariat to liaise with United Kingdom authorities, including through the Permanent Representation of the United Kingdom to the Council of Europe, in view of the smooth solution of this case. The Bureau will be informed on its follow-up at its first meeting in 2016.

Appendix 1



Strasbourg, 10 September 2015



CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS
Standing Committee
Bureau meeting

Strasbourg, 14-15 September 2015
(Room 17, opening: 9:30 am)

AGENDA

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

[Draft agenda]

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2015 PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES

[Note for the Bureau]

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 6 – Summary table of reporting]

[T-PVS (2015) 6 - Report of the 1st meeting of the Bureau]

2.1 Group of Specialists on the European Diploma of Protected Areas: report of the meeting and celebration of the 50th Anniversary

[T-PVS/DE (2015) 9 – Report of the meeting of the Group of Specialists on European Diploma of Protected Areas]

[Pisa Declaration]

[T-PVS (2015) 15 - Draft recommendation on the Future of the European Diploma for Protected Areas]

[T-PVS/DE (2015) 13 - Progress report on the Fulfilment of the Resolution of the Committee of Ministers (2012)19 on the European Diploma to the Poloniny National Park]

[T-PVS/DE (2015) 11 – Adopted resolutions concerning the European Diploma of Protected Areas in 2015]

2.2 Outcomes of the meeting of the ad hoc Select Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change

[T-PVS (2015) 8 – Report of the meeting]

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 16 - Climate change and biodiversity conservation: information document]

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 25 – Draft work-plan]

2.3 Outcomes of the 11th meeting of the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species

[T-PVS (2015) 10 – Report of the meeting of the Group of Experts]

[TPVS (2015) 7 – Report of the Workshop on the “Feral ungulates and their impact on Island Biodiversity in the Mediterranean and Macaronesian Regions”, La Gomera (Spain), 23-24.03.2015]

[TPVS (2015) 5 - Draft recommendation on the control of feral ungulates in islands of the Mediterranean and Macaronesian Regions]

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 1 - European Code of Conduct on Plantation Forestry and IAS]

[T-PVS (2015) 12 – Draft recommendation on the European Code of Conduct on Plantation Forestry and IAS]

[TPVS/Inf (2015) 14 - The Bern Convention and the EU Regulation 1143/2014 on the Prevention and Management of the Introduction and Spread of Invasive Alien Species]

[T-PVS (2015) 11 - Draft recommendation on action to promote and complement the implementation of EU Regulation 1143/2014 on IAS]

2.4 Outcomes of the 8th meeting of the Group of Experts on Amphibians and Reptiles

[T-PVS (2015) 13 – Meeting report]
[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 15 - Demography of marine turtles nesting in the Mediterranean Sea]
[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 20 - Priorities for conservation of amphibians and reptiles in Europe]
[T-PVS (2015) 9 – Draft recommendation on the prevention and control of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus]

2.5 Progress in the setting-up of the Emerald Network

[T-PVS/PA (2015) 6 – Mid-term review of progress achieved in the implementation of the Emerald Calendar (2011-2020)]

2.6 Meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks: state of preparation and expected results

[T-PVS/PA (2015)3 – Agenda of the meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks]

2.7 Conservation of birds: state of preparation of the forthcoming meeting of the Group of Experts

[Draft agenda of the meeting of the Group of Experts on the conservation of birds]

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BERN CONVENTION IN GREECE

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 22 – Draft Expert’s report on the implementation of the Convention in Greece]

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION: FILES

[T-PVS/Notes (2015) 3 – Summary of case files and complaints]
[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 4 – Register of Bern Convention’s case-files]

4.1 Specific Sites - Files open

- 2004/1: Ukraine: Proposed navigable waterway in the Bystroe Estuary (Danube delta)
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 12 – Government report Ukraine]
- 2004/2: Bulgaria: Wind farms in Balchik and Kaliakra –Via Pontica
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 22 – Government report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 35 - Report of the NGO]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 28 –EU report]
- 1995/6: Cyprus: Akamas peninsula
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 25 – Government report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 26 - Report of the NGO]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 28 – EU report]
- 2007/1: Italy: Eradication and trade of the American Grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 31 – Government report]
- 2010/5: Greece: threats to marine turtles in Thines Kiparissias
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 30 – Government report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 29 - Report of the NGO]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 28 – EU report]

4.2 Possible file

- 2011/4: Turkey: threat to the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*)
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 10 – Government report]
- [2012/3: Poland: Possible spread of the American mink]

4.3 Complaints on stand-by

- 2006/1: France: Protection of the European green toad (*Bufo viridis*) in Alsace
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 32 – Government report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 27 – Report of the NGO]
- 2014/6: Wind energy: Possible threats to an endangered natural habitat in Izmir (Turkey)
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 23 – Government Report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 17 – Complainant report]

- 2014/1: Presumed risk of national extinction of badgers in Ireland
[T-PVS/Files (2015) X – Government Report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 1 – Complainant report]
- 2014/8: Presumed large-scale exploitation and marketing of protected marine shelled molluscs in Greece
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 33 – Government Report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 19 – Complainant report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 28 – EU report]
- 2014/9 : Possible impact of haying performed in the steppe and forest-steppe reserves of Ukraine
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 13 – Government Report]
- [2012/5: Sport and recreation facilities in Çıralı key turtle nesting beach (Turkey)]
- [2012/7: Presumed illegal killing of birds in Malta]
- [2013/10: Impact of corn monoculture on the conservation status of protected species in Alsace, France]
- [2014/3: Presumed deliberate killing of birds in Serbia]
- **On-the-spot appraisals**
- File open - 2012/9: Presumed degradation of nesting beaches in Fethiye and Patara SPAs (Turkey)
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 18 – Government Report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 34 – Medasset report]
- File open - 2013/1: Hydro power development within the territory of Mavrovo National Park (“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”)

4.4 Mediation

- Possible File - 2013/5: Presumed impact of a construction of Overhead Power Line (OHL) in an environmentally sensitive area in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland

4.5 Other complaints

- Follow-up to complaint N° 2010/4 on the Increase in the number of sea turtle deaths recorded at Episkopi area under the control of the British Sovereign Base Area Administration (SBAA)
[T-PVS/Files (2015) X – Government Report]
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 38 – Communication from the NGO]

5. FOLLOW-UP OF PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation No. 25 (1991) on the conservation of natural areas outside protected areas proper
[T-PVS/Files (2015) 24 – Compilation of national reports]
[T-PVS/PA (2015) 8 – Report by the expert on the follow-up of Recommendation No. 25 (1991)]
- [File closed n° 1998/3: France: Habitats for the survival of the common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) in Alsace]
- [Recommendation No. 95 (2002) on the conservation of marine turtles in Kazanlı beach (Turkey)]
- [Recommendation No. 96 (2002) on conservation of natural habitats and wildlife, especially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland]
- Recommendation No. 98 (2002) on the project to build a motorway through the Kresna Gorge (Bulgaria)

6. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONVENTION

6.1 Follow-up to the CBD Strategic Plan for biodiversity

6.2 Relations with other MEAs

7. 35TH STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING

7.1 Draft Agenda

[T -PVS (2015) 1 – Draft Agenda]

7.2 Draft Programme of Activities 2016-2017

*[T-PVS/Notes (2015) 4 – Draft Calendar of meetings for 2016]
[T-PVS (2015) 14 - Draft Programme of Activities for 2016-2017]*

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Appendix 2**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

ARMENIA / ARMÉNIE

Ms Hasmik GHALACHYAN, Head, Division of Plant Resources Management, Agency of Bioresources Management, Ministry of Nature Protection, Government Building 3, Republic Square, 0010 YEREVAN

Tel.: +374 10273890. E-mail: ghalachyanhasmik@yahoo.com

CZECH REPUBLIC / REPUBLIQUE TCHEQUE

Mr Jan PLESNIK, Adviser to Director in foreign affairs, Nature Conservation Agency (NCA CR), Kaplanova 1931/1, CZ-148 00 PRAGUE 11 – CHODOV

Tel +42 283 069 246. Fax +42 283 069 E-mail: jan.plesnik@nature.cz

NORWAY / NORVÈGE

Mr Øystein STØRKERSEN, Principal Advisor, Norwegian Environment Agency, P.O. Box 5672, Sluppen, N-7485 TRONDHEIM

Tel: +47 7358 0500. Fax: +47 7358 0501 or 7358 0505. E-mail: oystein.storkersen@miljodir.no

ROMANIA / ROUMANIE

Mr Felix ZAHARIA, First Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, Aleea Alexandru nr. 31-33, BUCURESTI, 011822.

Tel/Fax: +40 214311712 / +40 213192354. E-mail: felix.zaharia@mae.ro

[Apologised for absence / Excusé]

SLOVAKIA / SLOVAQUIE

Ms Jana DURKOŠOVÁ, Senior State Advisor, Division for Nature and Landscape Protection, Ministry of the Environment, Námestie Ľ. Štúra 1, 812 35 BRATISLAVA.

Tel: +421 2 5956 2211. Fax: +421 2 5956 2031. E-mail: jana.durkosova@enviro.gov.sk

SECRETARIAT / SECRÉTARIAT

Council of Europe / Conseil de l'Europe, Directorate of Democratic Governance / Direction de la Gouvernance démocratique, F-67075 STRASBOURG CEDEX, France Tel : +33 3 88 41 20 00.
Fax : +33 3 88 41 37 51

Mr Eladio FERNÁNDEZ-GALIANO, Head of the Democratic Initiatives Department / Chef du Service des Initiatives démocratiques, Directorate of of Democratic Governance / Direction de la Gouvernance démocratique DGII

Tel: +33 388 41 22 59. Fax: +33 388 41 37 51 E-mail: eladio.fernandez-galiano@coe.int

Ms Ivana d'ALESSANDRO, Secretary of the Bern Convention / Secrétaire de la Convention de Berne, Biodiversity Unit / Unité de la Biodiversité

Tel : +33 3 90 2151 51. Fax : +33 3 88 41 37 51. E-mail : ivana.dalessandro@coe.int

Ms Iva OBREtenova, Administrator, Biodiversity Unit / Administrateur, Unité de la Biodiversité

Tel : +33 3 90 21 58 81. Fax : +33 3 88 41 37 51. E-mail : iva.obretenova@coe.int

Ms Christina BAGLAI, Principal Administrative assistant, Biodiversity Unit / Assistante administrative principale, Unité de la Biodiversité

Tel : +33 390 41 59 37. Fax : +33 3 88 41 37 51 E-mail : christina.baglaj@coe.int

Ms Véronique de CUSSAC, Administrative assistant, Biodiversity Unit / Assistante administrative,
Unité de la Biodiversité
Tel : +33 3 88 41 34 76 Fax : +33 3 88 41 37 51. E-mail : veronique.decusac@coe.int