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T-PVS/DE (2016) 4

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND
NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

36th meeting
Strasbourg, 15-18 November 2016

**Group of Specialists on the European Diploma
for Protected Areas**

Strasbourg
7 March 2016

- MEETING REPORT -

*Document prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

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Report of the meeting

The Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas (EDPA) met in Strasbourg on 7 March 2016. The Standing Committee/Bureau is invited to:

- take note of the meeting report of the Group of Specialists;
- instruct the Secretariat to carry out the visits as decided by the Group of Specialists;
- note in particular that the Group:
 - decided to postpone to its next meeting a decision on the possible withdrawal of the EDPA awarded to Poloniny National Park (the Slovak Republic);
 - decided not to propose the renewal of the EDPA awarded to Białowieża National Park (Poland) as a new Government forest management plan may affect negatively the area surrounding the National Park;
- examine and, if appropriate, propose the modifications to the Regulations of the EDPA for official adoption by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

1. WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE (2016) 2

The meeting was opened on Monday 7 March 2016 by the Chair the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas (“the EDPA”), Dr Jan Willem Sneep (the Netherlands).

The Chair of the Group welcomed the members of the Group, particularly the new members Dr Rozália Érdiné Szekeres, Head of Department for Nature Conservation, Ministry of Agriculture (Hungary), Mr Hasse Berglund, Head of Section, Environmental Protection Agency (Sweden) and Mr Bruno Petrucci, Officer, Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea (Italy, apologised). He also thanked the previous Chair of the Group, Mr Peter Skoberne (Slovak Republic) and members of the Group, Mr Aleksei Lotman (Estonia) and Mr Mustafa Ozkan (Turkey), for their commitment and dedicated work. The Chair further greeted the independent experts, the delegate of the Slovak Republic and the members of the Secretariat.

The list of participants is available in appendix 1.

The Chair highlighted that the conservation of biodiversity should be seen as a general concern of humanity. The EDPA was established to raise public awareness of biodiversity and to stimulate the efficient protection and management of protected areas in an exemplary way. Protected areas were awarded the EDPA for their outstanding scientific, cultural or aesthetic qualities and also for a sustainable conservation scheme. At present, 74 areas from 29 countries across Europe have been awarded the EDPA.

2. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE (2016)1

The Group adopted the draft agenda, as set out in appendix 2.

3. GENERAL INFORMATION ON ACTIVITIES PRESENTING AN INTEREST FOR THE WORK OF THE GROUP

Relevant document: T-PVS (2015) 30

Mr Eladio Fernández-Galiano, Head of the Democratic Initiatives Department of the Council of Europe, greeted the participants and explained the tasks of the Group and the rotation membership principle. He underscored the role of NGOs and park networks. He highlighted that no renewals of awards to EDPA holding areas were foreseen in 2017 whereas 20 areas were subject to renewal in 2018. Therefore, he invited the Group to consider which areas could be visited in 2016 as a matter of priority, with a view to a possible renewal in 2018.

The Secretariat provided information on the meetings foreseen in the framework of Bern Convention and its Groups of Experts. The calendar of activities can be consulted at the address: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/meetings-2016>

The Secretariat further updated the Group on the recent developments of the Emerald network, particularly a very positive mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the network calendar (2011-2020). In 2015, the Emerald Network covered nearly 600,000 km², about 3,000 fully adopted or candidate Emerald sites and an average of 11-12 % of the national territories of the participating countries. In December 2015, the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention agreed to the official nomination of the 429 areas proposed as candidate Emerald sites by Georgia, Norway and the Russian Federation. The Emerald network implementation has also been successful in the countries of the Eastern Partnership¹ and the Russian Federation, with Emerald sites covering between 7.5 and 11 % of the national territories and 200 new potential Emerald sites identified in 2015 alone. Three biogeographical seminars were conducted in 2015 and four more seminars are foreseen in 2016.

¹ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

4. SHORT PRESENTATION BY THE CHAIR OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GROUP IN 2015 AND OF ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN DURING THE LAST YEAR

*Relevant documents: T-PVS/DE (2015) 9
T-PVS/DE (2015) 11*

The Chair briefly described the outcomes of the work of the Group during 2015 and recalled the discussions held on the various EDPA areas, more specifically those in need of particular attention. Thus, the Group decided to postpone the renewal of the EDPA to the Central Balkan National Park until the adoption of its management plan.

The Chair mentioned the EDPA award to the Vashlovani Protected Areas (Georgia) and the EDPA renewal to the Weerribben-Wieden Nature Reserve (the Netherlands). He also mentioned the two exceptional on-the-spot appraisals conducted in 2015 to Podyji and Thayatal National Parks (Czech Republic and Austria) and to Bayerischer Wald National Park (Germany). The Chair further recalled the draft resolution of the Group (2015) on the withdrawal of the EDPA awarded to Poloniny National Park (Slovak Republic) before the period of validity, i.e. 18 September 2018. He informed the Group about the decision of the Standing Committee, at its 35th meeting in December 2015, not to proceed with the withdrawal and to grant a last stay to the Slovak authorities to finalise the adoption of the park's management plan.

The Chair recalled that celebrations around the 50th anniversary of the EDPA had taken place in 2015 and that an EDPA brochure had been released on that occasion. He stressed that in an effort to increase the visibility of the EDPA, the awarded areas were requested to report on the use of the EDPA logo in 2015.

5. OUTCOMES OF THE WORKSHOP ON “PROTECTED AREAS IN EUROPE: THE NEXT 50 YEARS”, THE PISA DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION NO. 181(2015) ON THE FUTURE OF THE EDPA

*Relevant documents: Pisa declaration
T-PVS (2015) 15*

The Secretariat summarised the outcomes of the workshop “Protected areas in Europe: the next 50 years” held on 21-22 May 2015 in the Regional Park Migliarino, San Rossore, Massaciuccoli (Pisa, Italy), as a contribution to the International Day for Biological Diversity. The workshop counted with the sponsorship of the Ministry of Environment of Italy and of the Tuscany Region, and the cooperation of EUROPARC Federation. It gathered 100 participants from 26 countries.

The workshop highlighted the need to react with innovative and specific responses to societal and technological changes, as well as to existing and new challenges threatening biodiversity. Participants committed to use the EDPA to trial innovative nature conservation management and demonstrate novel approaches, working with communities to find creative mutually beneficial nature-based solutions. Participants also highlighted the benefits of more regular meetings and the need to increase the anticipation capacity of the EDPA areas, notably in the context of climate change.

The Secretariat recalled that the Pisa Declaration adopted at the meeting called on governments, national and local authorities, local communities, nature conservation NGOs, and the Council of Europe, to ensure that EDPA continues to receive the necessary political and financial support for the further development of its network.

Another outcome of the meeting, a draft Recommendation No. 181 (2015) on the future of the EDPA, was adopted by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention in December 2015. The recommendation invited the Contracting Parties and Observer States to maintain the high natural values and exemplary management of the 74 Diploma-holding areas; to promote innovative conservation tools in these areas; to make proposals for new or additional sites, specifically from the States which had no EDPA areas yet; and to take into account the Guidance for the Management of the EDPA Areas appended to the Recommendation.

The Group had a lively discussion about the implementation of the Recommendation. The Chair stressed that implementation results would be visible in two to four years' time. In the meantime, the Group agreed that improved connection with local communities and visibility of the EDPA should be given high priority, particularly with a view to increasing the number of EDPA applications. The delegate of Ukraine highlighted that local communities should be aware of the EDPA benefits, such as recreation tourism and the sustainable use of natural resources. He also highlighted that the lack of knowledge of English could hinder communication between some EDPA areas and with the Council of Europe. Furthermore, the delegate of Hungary emphasised that lobbying should be fostered, particularly through EUROPARC Federation, whereas cooperation with the European Commission and UNESCO should intensify. The delegate from Portugal underscored the importance of holding meetings with EDPA area managers, in order to improve networking. The delegate of Sweden suggested identifying the competitive advantage of the EDPA, which would help protected areas concerned distinguish it from other awards while stimulating the inflow of new EDPA applications and contributing to building partnerships with other networks and areas. Lastly, the delegate of Ukraine stressed that the use of innovative technologies by the awarded areas should be mainstreamed. Area managers should be encouraged to disseminate ideas through the Council of Europe.

Further to the discussion on the implementation of Recommendation No. 181(2015) On the Future of the EDPA, the Group decided to charge the Secretariat to commission a study to identify ecosystems and landscapes missing from the EDPA network as well as areas which could enrich and diversify the network. The Secretariat was given mandate to liaise with the governments concerned and to encourage them to apply for the EDPA.

The Group decided to convene biennial thematic meetings of EDPA managers, if possible back-to-back with its annual meeting and in an EDPA area. The Group entrusted the Secretariat to identify a list of possible themes and locations for the upcoming meeting in 2017.

In an effort to increase the visibility of the EDPA, the Group decided to add to the annual reporting form the Guidance for the Management of European Diploma Areas in an Interconnected Era, as appended to Recommendation No. 181(2015). The reporting form should also feature a request to the areas to report on the EDPA visibility and provide pictures demonstrating the use of the EDPA logo. Furthermore, the EDPA areas would be requested to report on a topic of interest to be chosen by the Group on an annual basis, upon a proposal from the Secretariat. The Secretariat was charged to annually submit to the Group a list of proposed topics of interest prior to the reporting timeline (30 November). Topics of interest might coincide with the themes for biennial meetings.

The Group decided to establish a list of questions for experts visiting EDPA candidate areas and areas subject to a renewal of the EDPA. The questions should derive from Recommendation No. 181(2015) and should enable the identification of themes for biennial meetings and topics of interest for annual reporting.

6. STATE OF PROGRESS ON THE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

The Secretariat informed that a number of information requests about the EDPA had been received in 2015, in particular from a communication department of a park in the Southern Italy (title not specified). The application procedure was explained and follow-up is ensured through regular e-mail exchange.

The EDPA application of Karadag Nature Reserve has been postponed since 2014 at the request of the Permanent Representation of Ukraine to the Council of Europe.

At the same time, no formal application for the EDPA award was submitted in 2015. The Secretariat expressed readiness to increase outreach to potential EDPA areas, specifically after the release of the study on the diversification of the EDPA network (see the Group's decision under point 5 above).

7. RESULTS OF THE ADVISORY VISITS, DISCUSSION AND PROPOSALS TO THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The Group debated the results of the two visits held in 2015 to the EDPA areas mentioned below.

➤ **Poloniny National Park (Slovak Republic)**

*Relevant documents: T-PVS/DE (2016) 7
T-PVS/DE (2015) 9
T-PVS/DE (2015) 13
T-PVS/DE (2016) 9
T-PVS/DE (2015) 14*

The Secretariat reminded that Poloniny National Park had been under scrutiny of the Group particularly due to the long-term absence of a management plan and forestry-management issues. In 2015, the Group submitted to the Standing Committee a draft resolution on the withdrawal of the EDPA awarded to the park in 1998 before the period of validity, i.e. 18 September 2018. In December 2015, the Standing Committee decided to stay the withdrawal and to grant a last stay to the Slovak authorities to finalise the adoption of its management plan. The Standing Committee considered, taking note of the support of a number of Contracting Parties, that the withdrawal of the European Diploma in such a delicate moment would rather undermine the positive ongoing process.

On behalf of the Slovak authorities, Mr Michal Adamec, Director of Department for Nature and Landscape Protection, State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic, updated the Group on the implementation of the conditions and recommendations attached to the renewal of the EDPA. The management plan was approved by the State Secretary and the Ministry of the Environment started the official adoption process in January 2016 whereas public hearings with stakeholders were held in February 2016. The management plan would be adopted in April-May 2016. A new forest management plan was underway. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee welcomed the achievements by the Slovak authorities and would expect a progress report by December 2016.

Furthermore, Mr Adamec highlighted that cooperation with local stakeholders had improved throughout the process. This contributed to a better understanding of the nature values and local needs and increased willingness of the authorities and stakeholders to cooperate to secure those values for future.

In the light of the improvements made, the Slovak authorities asked the Group to reappraise the situation in Poloniny National Park and to postpone its decision at least until December 2016.

The expert, Mr Robert Brunner (Austria), informed that he had participated in the advisory visit to Poloniny National Park on 16-17 September 2015. He appraised the achievements made by the Slovak authorities, such as the wolf hunting ban; land purchasing; improved cooperation with the neighbouring areas in Germany, Poland and Ukraine. The progress in the implementation of the conditions and recommendations attached to the renewal could only be evaluated by examining the management plan. It would be important to establish criteria to measure progress in the implementation of the management plan; to vest more competence in the park managing authorities; to hire full-time rangers; and to increase the protected area of the Park (currently 7 %).

Thereafter, Mr Adamec responded to queries from the Group. He underlined that the authorities would need to step up their efforts in forest management, in particular by revising regimes apparent to clearcutting and ensuring better sustainability of the forests, including through sustainable tourism. He clarified that the park employed 12 employees, including two professional rangers.

The Group welcomed the progress made by the Slovak authorities in the implementation of the conditions and recommendations attached to the renewal of the EDPA to Poloniny National Park. It took note that the adoption of the management plan of Poloniny National Park was expected in April-May 2016. The Group agreed that it was necessary to evaluate the progress achieved by the authorities over time.

In the light of the above, the Group decided to postpone a decision on the possible withdrawal of the EDPA awarded to Poloniny National Park. It trusted the competent authorities to provide a copy of the management plan of the Park, as well as its English translation, after its adoption. The Group decided to continuously monitor the progress achieved by the competent authorities and review its decision subject to the Park's reporting results for 2016.

The Group gave mandate to the Secretariat to organise an on-the-spot appraisal to the Park, shall the circumstances so require.

➤ **Białowieża National Park (Poland)**

*Relevant documents: T-PVS/DE (2016) 5
T-PVS/DE (2016) 6
T-PVS/DE (2016) 8*

The Secretariat recalled that the renewal of the EDPA to Białowieża National Park had been suspended since 2007 particularly due to the absence of a management plan. Following the adoption of the management plan in 2014, the Group decided to organise a fresh on-the-spot appraisal. On 17-18 October 2015, expert Mr Olivier Biber (Switzerland) accompanied by the Secretariat visited the area. Based on the overall positive outcome of the visit, the expert recommended renewing the EDPA. A draft resolution on the renewal of the EDPA was prepared, available in appendix 3.

However, in January 2016, the Secretariat was alerted by NGOs and press reports that logging of the Białowieża Primeval Forest was to be restarted under a Government Forest Management Plan for 2012-2021 (*Plan Urządzania Lasu*). The Secretariat contacted the Polish authorities requesting to clarify the situation and invited them to attend the meeting of the Group. In subsequent correspondence, the Polish authorities declined the invitation and informed that no decision had been taken with regard to the Białowieża Primeval Forest. The authorities invited the Group and the Secretariat to attend a conference and a field visit to the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest on 12-13 March 2016, as part of a UNESCO/IUCN World Heritage mission. The Secretariat was not able to accept the invitation due to its short notification. The Secretariat received the information that expert Mr Hervé Lethier would join the mission on behalf of the IUCN.

The expert, Mr Biber, presented the results of the visit and responded to queries from the Group. He noted that the renewal of the EDPA would be premature in the circumstances.

In the light of the alleged changes to the forest management occurred after the expert visit to Białowieża National Park, the Group decided to defer a decision as to the renewal of the EDPA to its next meeting in 2017. The Group stressed that the EDPA should not be used against its own spirit and requested the competent Polish authorities to provide explanations about the situation.

The Group took note of the draft resolution on the renewal of the EDPA, which it would review at its next meeting in 2017, in the light of explanations to be provided by the authorities concerned.

8. ANNUAL REPORTS 2015: PRESENTATION OF THE REPORTING ANALYSIS BY THE SECRETARIAT AND THE GROUP

*Relevant documents: T-PVS/DE (2016) 3
T-PVS/DE (2016) 10*

The Secretariat recalled the objectives of annual reporting and the Group's mandate in this connection, as per Resolution CM/ResDip (2008) 1 on the revised regulations for the EDPA.

The Secretariat informed that the purpose of the analysis was to examine the 2015 annual reports received, and more specifically the information on measures implemented to comply with the conditions and/or recommendations attached to the EDPA award or its renewal. In 2015, a total of 65

reports were received which amounts to 88 per cent of the EDPA areas. The reporting rate is higher than in 2014 (82 per cent) and in 2013 (65 per cent). The increase can be explained by the simplified reporting format and enhanced follow-up between the Secretariat and the awarded areas. That said, the information on the use of the EDPA logo, requested by the Group at its meeting in 2015, was submitted only by 80 per cent of the areas which provided an annual report.

A document containing the analysis of reporting results by the Group and the Secretariat was prepared [T-PVS/DE (2016) 10] in an effort to increase the transparency of the assessment.

The Secretariat informed that 9 areas did not report in 2015, out of which 7 did not report in 2014 and 8 in 2013. This situation should be addressed on case-by-case basis.

The table below contains the decisions of the Group regarding the EDPA areas that submitted reports in 2015 and the areas that did not report. The decisions will be reflected in individual letters addressed to the areas concerned. The areas identified as areas of particular attention in 2015 are examined under point 9 of the agenda.

| No | EDPA area | Decision by the Group |
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| 1. | Armenia - Khosrov State Forest Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing the conditions and recommendations. Requested information on the concrete measures taken to implement condition no. 1 attached to the award. Requested updates on the adoption of a new management plan for 2015 onwards (recommendation no. 6). Encouraged the use of the EDPA logo in the Reserve and asked to report on its use in the course of 2016. |
| 2. | Austria – Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site | Encouraged the competent authorities to step up their efforts to avoid the spread of light pollution. |
| 3. | Austria – Thayatal National Park | Recalled further actions are required with a view to implementing the Recommendations of the Council of Europe further to the exceptional visit on 15-17 September 2014. |
| 4. | Austria - Wachau Protected Landscape | Encouraged the competent authorities to double their efforts to implement Recommendations 3, 6, 7 attached to the renewal. |
| 5. | Belarus - Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park | Requested the competent authorities to broaden their activities with a view to reinforcing the implementation of the recommendations attached to the renewal. |
| 6. | Belarus - Berezinsky State Biosphere Reserve | Welcomed the extension of the boundaries of the biosphere reserve (under the MAB program) through the increased transition cooperation zone, as agreed with the UNESCO International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves (IACBR). |
| 7. | Belgium - Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve | Regretted the repeated lack of annual reporting and asked the authorities to submit a annual report in 2016. |
| 8. | Bulgaria - Central Balkan National Park | <i>See point 9 Areas of particular attention</i> |
| 9. | Czech Republic - Bílé Karpaty Protected Landscape Area | Regretted the repeated lack of annual reporting and asked the authorities to submit an annual report in 2016. |
| 10. | Czech Republic - Karlštejn National Nature Reserve | Invited the competent authorities to intensify educational activities launched by the Administration of the Reserve. |
| 11. | Czech Republic - Podyjí National Park | Requested the competent authorities to enhance research on fish migration. |
| 12. | Estonia – Matsalu National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations and requested further implementation of the management plan, which was endorsed at the beginning of 2015. |
| 13. | Finland - Ekenäs Archipelago National Park | Invited the competent authorities to identify more actions to increase public awareness of the EDPA. |

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| 14. | Finland – Seitsemien National Park | Invited the competent authorities to identify more actions to increase public awareness of the EDPA and asked them to clarify what had been done to promote the park as an EDPA-holding area. |
| 15. | France – Camargue National Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing the conditions and recommendations, particularly with a view to adopting a management plan for 2016-2020, and requested a copy of the management plan upon its adoption. |
| 16. | France - Ecrins National Park | Welcomed the work on the implementation of the recommendations. For 2016, recommended keeping under observation the conditions of the glaciers and pursuing raising awareness in connection with the climate change. Asked the competent authorities to provide information on the use of the EDPA logo. Encouraged the authorities to pursue development projects, land management and various recreational and sports activities, given the very positive feedback received in 2015. |
| 17. | France – Mercantour National Park | Welcomed the progress in the implementation of all recommendations. Asked for an update on the nomination as a transboundary UNESCO World Heritage Site and on the use of EDPA logo. |
| 18. | France - Port-Cros National Park | Welcomed the progress in the implementation of all recommendations. For 2016, recommended that the competent authorities pursue the accession process of the coastal municipality to the Chart, set the new perimeter of the park and continuously monitor and control invasive alien species. |
| 19. | France - Scandola Nature Reserve | Regretted the repeated lack of annual reporting and asked the authorities to submit an annual report in 2016. |
| 20. | France - Vanoise National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing the condition and the recommendations, particularly the adoption of the Charter of the Park, the cooperation with the “twinned” Diploma area Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy) and the development of facilities for persons with disabilities. Noted that special attention was needed with regard to wolf management. |
| 21. | Georgia – Vashlovani Protected Areas | Noted sufficient progress in implementing all recommendations and suggested full enforcement of the management plan. |
| 22. | Germany – Bayerischer Wald National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing the condition and the recommendations of Resolution CM/ResDip(2011)4, particularly the extension of the non-intervention nature zone. Invited the park to report on the one condition and five recommendations relating to wind-energy developments as reflected in its Opinion adopted following the exceptional on-the-spot visit. |
| 23. | Germany - Berchtesgaden National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. |
| 24. | Germany - Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve | <i>See point 9 Areas of particular attention</i> |
| 25. | Germany - Siebengebirge Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. Requested the authorities to report in 2016 on the development of the construction status of the wind energy plant and to submit an impact assessment for that. |
| 26. | Germany - Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve | Regretted the repeated lack of annual reporting and asked the authorities to submit an annual report in 2016. |
| 27. | Germany - Wollmatinger Ried | Welcomed the progress in implementing the recommendations |

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| | Untersee-Gnadensee Nature Reserve | and encouraged the authorities to deploy further efforts to harmonise the protection measures by pursuing co-operation between Germany and Switzerland and continuing the round table negotiations. Requested the authorities to report on the management of problems caused by roads and industrial buildings moving directly to the border of the Nature Reserve. |
| 28. | Germany - Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve | Regretted the lack of annual reporting in 2015 and asked the authorities to submit an annual report in 2016. |
| 29. | Germany/ Luxembourg - Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park | Regretted the repeated lack of annual reporting and asked the authorities to submit an annual report in 2016. |
| 30. | Greece - Cretan White Mountains National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing the recommendations and asked for follow up information on the signature of the Presidential Decree on the extension of the boundaries of the National Park. Welcomed the measures taken to raise the awareness of the National Park as an EDPA. |
| 31. | Hungary - Ipolytarnóc Protected Area | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. |
| 32. | Hungary - Szénás Hills Protected Area | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. |
| 33. | Hungary – Tihany Peninsula | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. |
| 34. | Ireland – The Burren region | Welcomed the progress in implementing all conditions and recommendations. Noted that many actors were involved in the management and financing of the park and found it worth scrutinising in the years to come. Highlighted that simplifying the management planning might be a long-term goal. |
| 35. | Italy - Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park | <i>See point 9 Areas of particular attention</i> |
| 36. | Italy - Gran Paradiso National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing the condition and the recommendations, particularly the cooperation with the “twinned” Diploma area Vanoise National Park (France). Requested further updates on the adoption of the management plan and the setting up of a scientific advisory council. |
| 37. | Italy– Montecristo Island Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. Recommended keeping the financial difficulties under observation. |
| 38. | Italy – Maremma Regional Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing the recommendations. Encouraged the initiatives to create the park’s trademark, increase its visibility and remedy the economic difficulties. Asked to provide information about the use of the EDPA logo, the extension of the Park and the related “studies to fill in the format of request for the Environment Ministry.” |
| 39. | Italy - Maritime Alps Nature Park | Welcomed the fulfilment of the conditions and recommendations. Requested further updates on the process of nomination as a transboundary UNESCO World Heritage Site. |
| 40. | Italy - Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli | Welcomed the progress made in the implementation of all recommendations. Recommended keeping under observation in 2016 the ground-water salinity problems, technical requirements related to drilling wells and pumping, as well as the control of the deer and the wild boar. |
| 41. | Italy – Sasso Fratino Integral Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress made in the implementation of all recommendations. Recommended keeping under observation the |

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| | | management of the area in relation to the reorganisation of the State Forestry Corps. |
| 42. | Netherlands - Boschplaat Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing the recommendations. |
| 43. | Netherlands - De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing the conditions and recommendations. |
| 44. | Netherlands - De Weerriben-De Wieden Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing the condition and all recommendations and asked, in the 2016 annual report, to provide updates on the implementation of the N2000 management plan. |
| 45. | Netherlands - Naardermeer Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing the condition and recommendations. Encouraged the authorities to raise awareness of the Naardermeer Nature Reserve as an EDPA-holding area. |
| 46. | Poland - Białowieża National Park (BNP) | <i>See point 7 Results of the advisory visits</i> |
| 47. | Poland - Bieszczady National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing the conditions and recommendations, particularly with a view to adopting a management plan and extending the total size of strictly protected areas from 63% to 70% under the new action plan for 2016-2018. Requested a copy of the management plan upon its adoption. |
| 48. | Portugal - Desertas Islands Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing all the recommendations and greeted the commitment of the regional authorities to update the management plan by the end of 2016. Welcomed the measures taken to raise awareness of the Nature Reserve as an EDPA-holding area. |
| 49. | Portugal - Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing all the recommendations as well as the measures taken to raise awareness of the Nature Reserve as an EDPA-holding area. |
| 50. | Romania - Piatra Craiului National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations and the measures taken to raise awareness of the National Park as an EDPA-holding area. |
| 51. | Romania - Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations and the measures taken to raise the awareness of the Biosphere Reserve as an EDPA. |
| 52. | Romania - Retezat National Park | Regretted the lack of annual reporting and asked the authorities to submit an annual report in 2016. |
| 53. | Russian Federation - Kostomuksha Strict Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing all conditions and recommendations and suggested the use of the EDPA logo. Requested the authorities to report in 2016 on the implementation of the conditions and recommendations attached to the last renewal as per Resolution CM/ResDip(2012)13. |
| 54. | Russian Federation - Oka National Biosphere Reserve | <i>See point 9 Areas of particular attention</i> |
| 55. | Russian Federation - Teberda National Biosphere Reserve | Regretted the repeated lack of annual reporting and asked the authorities to submit an annual report in 2016. |
| 56. | Russian Federation - Tsentralno-Chernozemny Biosphere Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. |
| 57. | Slovak Republic - Dobročský National Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing the condition and recommendations as well as the efforts to organise a special excursion to the Dobročský prales National Nature Reserve on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the EDPA. |

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| 58. | Slovak Republic - Poloniny National Park | <i>See point 7 Results of the advisory visits</i> |
| 59. | Slovenia - Triglav National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing the condition and recommendations. Asked to report in 2016 on the adoption of the Governmental Decree concerning the Park Management Plan. |
| 60. | Spain - Doñana National Park | Welcomed the good progress in implementing the conditions and recommendations. Asked to include in the 2016 report information on the (1) adoption of the Governmental Decree concerning the Park Management Plan; (2) adequacy of the second planning cycle (2015-2021) of the Hydrological Plan of the Guadalquivir River basin and (3) the evaluation of the Hydrological Plan. |
| 61. | Spain - Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations and the measures taken to raise awareness of the National Park as an EDPA. |
| 62. | Spain - Teide National Park | Regretted the repeated lack of annual reporting and asked the authorities to submit an annual report in 2016. |
| 63. | Sweden - Bullerö and Långviksskär nature reserves | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. Requested the authorities to report on the progress in the adoption of the management plan. Will closely monitor the management of the area. |
| 64. | Sweden - Muddus National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. Requested the authorities to monitor declining species in the area, such as large carnivores. Encouraged the authorities to establish a linkage to management and/or climate change in order to allow for buffering within the management plans. |
| 65. | Sweden - Sarek and Padjelanta National Parks | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. Encouraged the authorities to raise awareness of the National Parks as EDPA-holding areas. |
| 66. | Sweden - Store Mosse National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. Encouraged the authorities to raise awareness of the National Park as an EDPA-holding area. |
| 67. | Switzerland - Swiss National Park (SNP) | Welcomed the progress in implementing all recommendations. |
| 68. | Turkey - Kuşçenneti National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing the conditions and recommendations. Reiterated its request to report on the evaluation of the wetland management plan for 2011-2015 and the adoption of the management plan for the next period. |
| 69. | Ukraine - Carpathian Biosphere Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing the recommendations. Called upon the authorities to strengthen their efforts in wildlife management, including by devising and adopting an Action Plan on the Wolf and reducing poaching activities. Encouraged the authorities to submit their 2016 report well in advance before the meeting of the Group. |
| 70. | United Kingdom - Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing the recommendations. |
| 71. | United Kingdom - Fair Isle National Scenic Area | Welcomed the progress in implementing the condition and all recommendations, particularly the progress made in the monitoring of large carnivores over time. |
| 72. | United Kingdom - Minsmere Nature Reserve | Welcomed the progress in implementing the recommendations. |
| 73. | United Kingdom - Peak District National Park | Welcomed the progress in implementing the condition and all recommendations. |
| 74. | United Kingdom - Purbeck | Welcomed the progress in implementing the conditions and all |

| | |
|----------------|------------------|
| Heritage Coast | recommendations. |
|----------------|------------------|

9. ANNUAL REPORTS: DISCUSSION ON THE AREAS IN NEED OF PARTICULAR ATTENTION BY THE GROUP AND FUTURE RENEWALS

➤ Suggested actions for European Diploma areas in need of particular attention

*Relevant documents: T-PVS/DE (2016) 3
T-PVS/DE (2016) 10*

The Group deliberated on the situation in the following EDPA areas identified as requiring special attention.

a. *Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria)*

The renewal of the European Diploma to the park has been suspended since 2014, pending the official adoption of a new management plan.

In 2015, the Group decided to postpone the renewal of the European Diploma until the official adoption of the management plan and asked the authorities to report on the issue.

In 2015, the authorities informed that the updated management plan was being finalised and its adoption was expected by the end of February 2016. There would be no significant changes in comparison with the previous management plan, including in the management of the livestock grazing. At the same time, grazing-related norms and regimes would be well detailed in the management plan.

The Group decided to defer the EDPA renewal to the Central Balkan National Park pending the official adoption of the management plan. The Group took note of the information by the authorities that the adoption of the management plan was foreseen in February 2016 and requested the authorities to provide a copy of the management plan along with its English translation.

b. *Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve (Germany)*

The area continued to be under scrutiny in the view of new developments related to the planning of Volkwardingen Wind Park which would spoil the unique landscape and biodiversity of Lüneburger Heide. In 2014, the Higher Administrative Court of Lower Saxony declared the planning document inaccurate and removed the zoning for Volkwardingen Wind Park.

In 2015, the Group greeted the court decision and asked the authorities to keep the Group updated.

In 2015, the authorities reported that despite the court decision, the regional planning authority (Landkreis Heidekreis) pursued works on a zone for wind energy in Volkwardingen. The park authorities asked the Council of Europe to protect the unique biodiversity site. They claimed that Volkwardingen Wind Park would also block an important migration corridor for the black grouse and the black stork and would destroy an important habitat for bats, including red kites (*Milvus milvus*). The species would have been disturbed by drones to force their departure from the proposed project site.

It appears that an impact study of the “Lüneburger Heide” has been conducted. The park authorities claimed that its results were altogether defective and incomplete. They asked for a full assessment of environmental effects of the windmill project in accordance with 92/43/EWG Habitats Directive.

The Group welcomed the progress in implementing the recommendations.

The Group expressed concern over the allegedly ongoing windmill zoning for Volkwardingen Wind Park despite the court decision of 2014 to remove it. It asked the authorities to report on the issue and to keep it under review.

The Group highlighted the possibility of submitting a complaint under the case-file system of the Bern Convention, using an online complaint form: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/monitoring>.

c. Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy)

The main issue continues to be the official adoption of a new management plan, due by 2013. Furthermore, in the light of the information received in 2015, the decline of the Marsican brown bear (*Ursus arctos marsicanus*) continues to remain an issue of concern.

The Group welcomed the progress in implementing the recommendations.

The Group strongly advised that the competent authorities step up efforts to adopt the management plan for the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park and to define the contiguous areas. The Group asked the authorities to report on the progress thereof in 2016.

Further, the Group expressed concern over the alleged decline of the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) classified as strictly protected under Appendix II to the Bern Convention. The Group requested the authorities to monitor its population. The Group asked the authorities to report on the measures taken to protect the brown bear, particularly sanitary measures.

d. Oka National Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation)

The Group appraised the information from the Oka National Biosphere Reserve that the management plan of the reserve had been developed in 1997 but had not been confirmed by the Ministry of Natural Resources. The Group is concerned by the statement in the 2015 report that the management plan has a “recommendatory character.”

The Group welcomed the progress in implementing most of the recommendations. The Group asked to provide further information in the 2016 report about participatory management of stakeholders and landowners.

The Group expressed concern that the management plan devised in 1997 had not been formally adopted. It requested the competent authorities, including the Ministry concerned, to clarify the rules of procedure related to the adoption of the management plan for the Oka National Biosphere Reserve.

➤ **Possible exceptional on-the-spot appraisals to be carried out in 2016**

The Group did not identify such possible exceptional on-the-spot appraisals for 2016. Shall such a need arise in the course of the year, the Group will assess it and take a decision accordingly.

➤ **Draft list of areas to be visited in 2016 and 2017 in view of pending renewals**

The Secretariat informed that no visits are foreseen in 2016 with a view to a possible renewal of the EDPA in 2017. In 2017, there are 20 candidate areas for a possible renewal in 2018. In 2018, there are 13 areas for a possible renewal in 2019. Visiting 20 areas in one year is beyond the human and financial capacity of the Secretariat.

Based on the reporting results and the dates of the last visit of the areas concerned by the possible renewal in 2018, the Secretariat suggested visiting 16 areas, including 9 areas in 2016 and 7 areas in 2017.

The Group endorsed the proposal of the Secretariat.

The Group decided that visits to 16 EDPA areas pending a possible renewal in 2018 would be conducted between 2016 (9 visits) and 2017 (7 visits), as per the table below.

The table below outlines the areas to be visited in 2016-2017 and the experts proposed.

| N | Name | Country | Award date | Last visit | Last renewal | Report 2013 | Report 2014 | Report 2015 | Next visit | Expert proposed |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park | Germany/Luxembourg | 26.10.73 | 2007 | 2012 | No | No | No | 2016 | E.Kuijken |
| 2 | Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve | Germany | 03.03.78 | 2002 | 2008 | No | No | No | 2016 | R. Brunner |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|--------------------|----------|-----------|------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|------------|
| 3 | Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park | Spain | 13.06.88 | 2002-2003 | 2008 | Yes | Yes | Yes | 2016 | O.Biber |
| 4 | Store Mosse National Park | Sweden | 13.06.88 | 2002 | 2008 | Yes | Yes | Yes | 2016 | P.Galland |
| 5 | Bullerö and Långviksskär Nature Reserves | Sweden | 13.06.88 | 2002 | 2008 | Yes | Yes | Yes | 2016 | P.Galland |
| 6 | Montecristo Island Nature Reserve | Italy | 13.06.88 | 2002 | 2008 | No | Yes | Yes | 2016 | O.Biber |
| 7 | Kostomuksha Strict Nature Reserve | Russian Federation | 18.09.98 | 2007 | 2012 | No | No | Yes | 2016 | H. Lethier |
| 8 | Tsentralno-Chernozemny Biosphere Reserve | Russian Federation | 18.09.98 | 2007 | 2012 | Yes | Yes | Yes | 2016 | H. Lethier |
| 9 | Matsalu National Park | Estonia | 28.05.03 | 2007 | 2012 | Yes | Yes | Yes | 2016 | M. Usher |
| 10 | Mercantour National Park | France | 03.05.93 | 2002 | 2008 | No | No | Yes | 2017 | O.Biber |
| 11 | Maritime Alps Nature Park (formerly the Argentera Nature Park) | Italy | 03.05.93 | 2002 | 2012 | No | Yes | Yes | 2017 | J. Sultana |
| 12 | Dobročský National Nature Reserve | Slovak Republic | 18.09.98 | 2002 | 2012 | Yes | Yes | Yes | 2017 | R. Brunner |
| 13 | Volcanic phenomena of the Tihany Peninsula | Hungary | 28.05.03 | 2007 | 2012 | Yes | No | Yes | 2017 | P.Galland |
| 14 | Khosrov Forest Reserve | Armenia | 10.07.13 | 2013 | NA | No | No | Yes | 2017 | H. Lethier |
| 15 | The Burren Region | Ireland | 10.07.13 | 2013 | NA | No | Yes | Yes | 2017 | M. Usher |
| 16 | Poloniny National Park | Slovak Republic | 18.09.98 | 2015 | 2012 (till 2018) | Yes | Yes | Yes | 2017 | R. Brunner |
| 17 | Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve | United Kingdom | 22.05.83 | 2002 | 2008 | No | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 18 | Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park | Belarus | 30.09.97 | 2011 | 2013 | No | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 19 | Bieszczady National Park | Poland | 18.09.98 | 2007 | 2012 | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 20 | Thayatal National Park | Austria | 28.05.03 | 2014 (ex) | 2012 | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No |

10. VISIBILITY OF THE EDPA AND AWARDED AREAS

The Secretariat briefly presented the new EDPA web-page <http://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/european-diploma-for-protected-areas> and visibility initiatives by the awarded areas. The members of the Group presented visibility initiatives by the EDPA areas in Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal and Ukraine. They discussed challenges to improved EDPA visibility and how to address them.

The Group regretted that not all EDPA areas mentioned the EDPA on their visibility materials. The Group encouraged all EDPA areas to include the EDPA logo and information on their websites, letterheads and printed materials. The Group asked the EDPA areas to report on the EDPA visibility and provide pictures demonstrating the use of the EDPA logo.

The Group agreed that the EDPA needed a cost-effective visibility strategy. In the first place, the EDPA visibility strategy should target biodiversity professionals, including the EDPA area managers, ecological tourism and trade. The strategy should rely on social media. In particular, the facebook page of the Bern Convention should be explored as a platform for raising awareness of the EDPA. A promotional video of the EDPA should be produced.

11. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Secretariat would notify the members of the Group of the date of the next meeting, to be held in 2017, in due course.

12. OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair noted that the present Regulations for the EDPA provide for an automatic renewal of the award to the areas after its first renewal, which seemed to contradict the standards of high quality required by the EDPA.

The Group proposed to amend the Article 9 para.7 of the Resolution of the Committee of Ministers CM/ResDip (2008) 1 on the revised Regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas as follows:

Present text:

“After the first renewal, the Diploma will be automatically renewed every ten years, without any prior appraisal, except where there is an express request from the government of the country concerned or in the case of a recognised threat to the area.”

New text:

“After the first renewal, the Diploma may be renewed by the Committee of Ministers every ten years, without any compulsory prior appraisal.”

13. CLOSURE

The Chair thanked the members of the Group, the experts and the delegate of the Slovak authorities for their contribution to the meeting. The Chair also thanked the Secretariat for the work in the preparation of the meeting and the documents.

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair.

Appendix 1 – List of participants

CHAIR OF THE GROUP OF SPECIALISTS / PRESIDENT DU GROUPE DE SPECIALISTES

NETHERLANDS/PAYS-BAS

Mr Jan Willem SNEEP
Laan van Meerdervoort 1030
2564 AW The Hague
Netherlands
E-mail : [jwsneep\[at\]live.nl](mailto:jwsneep[at]live.nl)

SPECIALISTS / SPECIALISTES

HUNGARY/HONGRIE

Dr. Rozália Érdiné SZEKERES (**Member**)
Head of Department for Nature Conservation
Ministry of Agriculture
Kossuth tér 11.
1055 Budapest
Hungary
E-mail : [rozalia.szekeres.erdine\[at\]fm.gov.hu](mailto:rozalia.szekeres.erdine[at]fm.gov.hu)

ITALY/ITALIE

Mrs. Anna Maria MAGGIORE (**Member - apologised**)
Officer
Ministry of the Environment, Land and sea
DG Nature and Sea Protection
Via C. Colombo, 44
00147 Roma
Italy
E-mail: [maggiore.annamaria\[at\]minambiente.it](mailto:maggiore.annamaria[at]minambiente.it)

Mr Bruno PETRUCCI (**Member - apologised**)
Officer
Ministry of the Environment, Land and sea
DG Nature and Sea Protection
Via C. Colombo, 44
00147 Roma
Italy
E-mail: [petrucci.bruno\[at\]minambiente.it](mailto:petrucci.bruno[at]minambiente.it)

PORTUGAL

Ms. Ana RAINHO (**Member**)
Head of the Division of Biodiversity Conservation at ICNF
Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas, IP
Divisão de Conservação da Biodiversidade
Avenida da República, n.º 16 a 16B
1050-191 Lisboa
Portugal
E-mail : [amrainho\[at\]fc.ul.pt](mailto:amrainho[at]fc.ul.pt)

SWEDEN/SUEDE

Mr Hasse BERGLUND (**Member**)

Head of Section

Swedish Environmental Protection Agency

Section of Protection and Management of Nature Reserves and National Parks

Policy Implementation Division

Valhallavägen 195

106 48 Stockholm

Sweden

E-mail : [Hasse.Berglund\[at\]naturvardsverket.se](mailto:Hasse.Berglund@naturvardsverket.se)

UKRAINE

Mr Igor IVANENKO (**Member**)

Deputy Head of the State Agency for Protected Areas

Ministry of Environmental Protection of Ukraine

Building 35, Uritskogo street

03035 Kyiv

Ukraine

E-mail: [ecoland\[at\]menr.gov.ua](mailto:ecoland@menr.gov.ua)

CONSULTANTS/EXPERTS

Mr Olivier BIBER

Président de "Nos Oiseaux"

Brunngasse 2, Postfach 658

3000 Bern

Switzerland

E-Mail: [olivier.biber\[at\]nosoiseaux.ch](mailto:olivier.biber@nosoiseaux.ch)

Mr Robert BRUNNER

Kirchengasse 39/13

1070 Wien

Austria

Tel.: +43 660 384 7635

E-mail : [rbw748\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:rbw748@gmail.com)

Mr Mario COLANTONI (**apologised**)

Expert

Ministry of the Environment, Land and sea

DG Nature and Sea Protection

Via C. Colombo, 44

00147 Roma

Italy

E-mail: [colantoni.mario\[at\]minambiente.it](mailto:colantoni.mario@minambiente.it)

OTHER PARTICIPANTS / AUTRES PARTICIPANTS

Mr Michal ADAMEC
Director of department for nature and landscape protection
State Nature Conservancy of Slovak Republic
Tajovskeho 28B
974 01 Banská Bystrica
Slovak Republic
E-mail: [michal.adamec\[at\]sopsr.sk](mailto:michal.adamec@sopsr.sk)

SECRETARIAT

DIRECTORATE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE/
DIRECTION DE LA GOUVERNANCE DEMOCRATIQUE
Biodiversity Unit / Unité de la biodiversité
Fax: +33 (0)3 88 41 37 51

Mr Eladio FERNANDEZ-GALIANO
Tel: +33 (0)3 88 41 22 59
E-mail: [eladio.fernandez-galiano\[at\]coe.int](mailto:eladio.fernandez-galiano@coe.int)

Ms Christina BAGLAI-DURNESCU
Tel: +33 (0)3 90 21 59 37
E-mail: [christina.baglai-durnescu\[at\]coe.int](mailto:christina.baglai-durnescu@coe.int)

Ms Tania BRAULIO
Tel: +33 (0)3 88 41 23 02
E-mail: [tania.braulio\[at\]coe.int](mailto:tania.braulio@coe.int)

Appendix 2 – Agenda

MONDAY 7 MARCH 2016

9h00 – 9h40 Welcome and opening of the meeting

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING BY THE CHAIR

Dr Jan Willem Sneep (the Netherlands), Chair of the Group of Specialists

2. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA

[Document T-PVS/DE (2016) 1]

3. GENERAL INFORMATION ON ACTIVITIES PRESENTING AN INTEREST FOR THE WORK OF THE GROUP

Mr Eladio Fernández-Galiano, Head of the Democratic Initiatives Department
Ms Christina Baglai, Project Support Officer

4. SHORT PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE GROUP IN 2015 AND OF THE ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN DURING THE LAST YEAR

Dr Jan Willem Sneep, Chair of the Group of Specialists

Report of meeting of the GS EDPA [T-PVS/DE (2015) 9]

Adopted resolutions concerning the EDPA in 2015 [T-PVS/DE (2015) 11]

9h40 – 10h10 Future of the EDPA

5. OUTCOMES OF THE WORKSHOP ON “PROTECTED AREAS IN EUROPE: THE NEXT 50 YEARS,” PISA DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION NO. 181(2015) ON THE FUTURE OF THE EDPA

Ms Christina Baglai, Project Support Officer [9.40-9.50]

- Discussion: how to implement the above Recommendation, *Chair* [9.50-10.00]

**Pisa Declaration
Recommendation No. 181(2015) On the Future of the EDPA [T-PVS (2015)15]**

6. STATE OF PROGRESS ON THE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

10h10 – 10h30 COFFEE BREAK

10h30 – 11h30 Exceptional visits carried out in 2015

7. RESULTS OF THE ADVISORY VISITS, DISCUSSION AND PROPOSALS TO THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE:

- **Poloniny National Park (Slovak Republic)**

Mr Michal Adamec, Director, Department for Nature and Landscape Protection, State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic [10.30-11.00]

Extract from the list of decisions and texts adopted at the 35th Standing Committee meeting [T-PVS/DE (2016) 7]

Draft Resolution on the withdrawal of the EDPA [T-PVS/DE (2015)9, Appendix V]

**Updated Progress reports on the Fulfilment of the Resolution CM/ResDip (2012) 19 on the renewal of the EDPA to the Poloniny NP [T-PVS/DE (2015) 13, T-PVS/DE (2016) 9]
Report of the visit of the Independent Expert to Poloniny NP [T-PVS/DE (2015) 14]**

➤ **Białowieża National Park (Poland)**

Mr Olivier Biber, independent expert [11.00-11.30]

Report of the visit of the Independent Expert to Białowieża NP [T-PVS/DE (2016) 5]

Report by the Government [T-PVS/DE (2016) 6]

Draft Resolution on the renewal of the EDPA to Białowieża NP (Poland) [T-PVS/DE (2016) 8]

11h30 – 12h30 Annual reports 2015

8. PRESENTATION OF THE REPORTING RESULTS BY THE SECRETARIAT AND THE GROUP

Compilation of annual reports by EDPA zones [T-PVS/DE (2016) 3]

12h30 – 14h00 LUNCH BREAK

14h00 – 16h00 Annual reports 2015 (continued)

9. DISCUSSION OF THE AREAS IN NEED OF PARTICULAR ATTENTION BY THE GROUP AND FUTURE RENEWALS

- Suggested actions
- Possible exceptional on-the-spot appraisals to be carried out in 2016
- Draft list of areas to be visited in 2016 and 2017 in view of the pending renewals*

*** NB:** No visits are foreseen in 2016 with a view to the possible renewal of the EDPA in 2017. In 2017, there are 20 areas candidate for possible renewal in 2018. [In 2018, there are 13 such areas for possible renewal in 2019]. Visiting 20 areas in 2017 is beyond the human and financial capacity of the Secretariat. The GoS should identify priority areas for appraisals, for 2017 and possibly 2016, taking into account *inter alia* the areas in need of particular attention (5 remaining further to the identification by the GoS in 2015 [T-PVS/DE (2015)9]) and reporting results for 2015).

16h00 – 16h20 COFFEE BREAK

16h20 – 17h30 Other business and closure of the meeting

10. VISIBILITY OF THE EDPA AND AWARDED AREAS

- **Short presentation of the new EDPA web-page and visibility initiatives by awarded areas**
Ms Christina Baglai, Project Support Officer
- **Celebration of the 50th anniversary of the EDPA: evaluation of the benefits and lessons learnt for improving the visibility of the EDPA**
Reports by the Chair and the Group

11. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

12. OTHER BUSINESS

13. CLOSURE

Appendix 3 - Draft Resolution on the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to Białowieża National Park (Poland)

CM Documents

CM(2016)

...Meeting,2016
Sustainable Development

Standing Committee to the Bern Convention

Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas

(T-PVS/DE)

**Draft Resolution CM/ResDip(2016) ...
on the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to Białowieża National Park (Poland)**

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on ... 2016 at the ... meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma, as amended by Resolution (98) 29 on the Regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas;

Having regard to Resolution (97) 20 awarding the European Diploma to Białowieża National Park;

Having regard to Resolution ResDIP(2002) 3 on the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to Białowieża National Park;

Taking into consideration the expert's report drafted following an on-the-spot appraisal on 16-18 September 2015, as recommended by the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas at its meeting on 13 March 2015, and presented at the meeting of the Group of Specialists on 7 March 2016;

Renews the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to Białowieża National Park until 2026;

Attaches the following conditions to the renewal:

1. Draw up a peer-reviewed 20-year management plan for Białowieża National Park by the end of 2017 in coordination with the planned Natura 2000 management plan for the whole area of the Białowieża forest;

2. Continue the close cooperation between the forest and conservation authorities in view of achieving coherent and coordinated management of the whole forest area, which will permit the maintenance and improvement of the ecological characteristics of the Białowieża forest, including in particular present and future old growth stands, which shall be excluded from harvesting, including salvage logging and sanitary felling;

3. Wildlife, including in particular the bison population of the Białowieża forest, but also populations of other larger wide-ranging animals like wolves, is managed by Białowieża National Park.

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

1. The management of the whole Natura 2000 zone should focus on forest conservation;

2. Existing forestry policy and practices be reviewed with a view to maximising biodiversity outside protected areas as well as by (1) maintaining the ban on cutting down old trees (more than 100 years old) and (2) significantly increasing the volume of dead wood by ceasing marketing wood from sanitation felling and protected reserves; all data with regard to the characteristics of trees felled within the Białowieża forest complex (species, age, amount of sanitation felling and commercial exploitation) be communicated to the Council of Europe every year and analysed in order to improve conservation measures;

3. Consider proposing the whole area of Natura 2000 as a European Diploma area, where the National Park and the old-growth stands would receive a high level of protection and the rest of the forest area and the adjacent pastures and meadows would play the role of a large buffer zone including functional corridors between the National Park and nature reserves outside the National Park, as this would permit a coherent management of the whole area;

4. Town planning be critically reviewed with a view to preventing the fragmentation and disappearance of buffer zones;

5. Tourist access to fully protected areas be kept under control; kayaking and other aquatic leisure activities on the Narewka and Hwoźna rivers should remain strictly prohibited;

6. Education and training activities be further stepped up so as to support the redistribution of jobs, with a shift away from the forestry sector towards the conservation and sustainable eco-tourism sector, thereby increasing the number of interesting local jobs for young people;

7. Seek contacts with relevant Belarus authorities with the aim of exploring ways and means to: (a) avoid further depletion of the water table thus ensuring the protection of the forest from drought; (b) allow animal dispersion and migration across the border; and (c) improve cooperation in the conservation, science and tourism sectors.