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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND NATURAL  
HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

33<sup>rd</sup> meeting  
Strasbourg, 3-6 December 2013

**REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE GROUP OF SPECIALISTS ON THE  
EUROPEAN DIPLOMA OF PROTECTED AREAS**

*Document prepared by the  
Democratic Governance Directorate*

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The Group of Specialists on the European Diploma of Protected Areas met in Strasbourg on 26 March 2013. The competent Committee is invited to:

- Take note of the meeting report of the group of Specialists
- Consider, with a view to forwarding them to the Committee of Ministers for adoption, the draft Resolutions (Appendix III) on the award and the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas for the following areas:
  - Khosrov Forest Reserve (Armenia)
  - Burren region (Ireland)
  - Retezat National Park (Romania)
- Take note of the opinion of the Group of Specialists (Appendix IV) following the extraordinary appraisal report on the Poloniny National Park

Acknowledgements: This meeting was partly financed by the Government of Switzerland.

## **1. Opening of the meeting**

The meeting was opened on Tuesday 26 March by the Chair, Michael Usher (United Kingdom). He welcomed the participants, listed in Appendix I.

## **2. Adoption of the agenda**

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE(2013)1

The Group adopted the draft agenda, as set out in Appendix II.

## **3. General information**

Mr Eladio Fernandez-Galiano, Head of the Biological Diversity Unit, informed on the restructuring of the Secretariat which had resulted in a change in his own responsibilities. He is now the Head of a bigger Department for Democratic Initiatives (which includes the Secretariat of the Bern Convention), within the Directorate for Democratic Governance of GD II Democracy. He further presented two new members of the Secretariat of the Bern Convention, Mrs Lilia Kolombet and Mrs Julia Westmacott.

He informed the Group of the adoption by the Committee of Ministers on 20 June 2012 of the Resolutions examined at its meeting on 9 – 10 February 2012 concerning the renewal of the European Diploma for twenty areas.

He further informed that further to the decision of the Group of Specialists to refer to the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention concerning a possible renewal of the European Diploma to the Belovezskaya Pushcha National Park, the Committee proposed a renewal of 5 years. The Committee of Ministers is expected to officially adopt the Resolution on 27 March 2013. In conclusion, he informed that Belarus deposited its instrument of accession to the Bern Convention on 19th February 2013 and will become the 51st Party to the Convention on 1st June 2013.

## **4. Short presentation by the Chair of the 2012 meeting report**

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE(2012)15

The Chair briefly described the outcomes of the previous meeting, underlying a most welcome increase in the submission of applications for the European Diploma in the last two years.

## **5. Applications for the European Diploma of Protected Areas**

### **5.1 The Desertas Islands Nature reserve (Portugal)**

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE(2013)4

The application for the European Diploma was sent to the Bern Convention secretariat by the Madeira Autonomous Region.

Mr Paulo Oliveira, Head of the Madeira Natural Park Services, presented the area and its unique nature features. Desertas Islands are a group of three islands of volcanic origin: Ilhéu Chão, Deserta Grande and Bugio. The islands are made up of high rocky masses forming sea cliffs, resulting from erosion, especially marine abrasion. Due to their geographic location, isolation and difficult conditions for colonisation, they offer habitats that are representative and important for the conservation of the biodiversity of Macaronesia and the world, particularly for the endemism and species that are threatened and vulnerable on a world-wide scale, such as the Mediterranean monk seal, the Deserta's petrel, the Deserta's Musschia and many invertebrates.

Mr Oliveira further presented examples of recent projects implemented in the area, the legal status of the area (a Nature Reserve and a Special Protection Area), which is the property of, and under the jurisdiction of, the Madeira Autonomous Region.

The Group welcomed this new application and felt that its terrestrial and marine natural heritage was of European importance. The Group asked that a visit be carried out to confirm the outstanding nature of the area and ensure that it met the other criteria laid down in the rules, subject to the reception by the Bern Convention Secretariat of the agreement of the national authorities of Portugal for the submission of the application.

The Group asked the expert to give special attention to the development for recreational/tourism purposes and its compatibility with the preservation of the natural values of the area, including the introduction and control of invasive alien species.

## **5.2 Karadag Nature Reserve (Ukraine)**

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE (2013)07

Mr Grygorii Partchuk from the Ukrainian Agency for Protected Areas presented the application. Karadag Nature Reserve is a nature protection and scientific institution created in 1979, aiming at the conservation of the rare flora and fauna of the terrestrial and marine ecosystems and the unique natural mineralogical sequences of the Karadag paleo-volcano of Jurassic period. About 200 species and over 10 natural habitats of European importance (Appendices I to III of the Bern Convention) are present in the area, including geological evidence of volcanic activity, historical and archaeological monuments. He further gave examples of the long term ecological and scientific monitoring (since 1914) and educational activities taking place in the area.

The Group thanked Mr Partchuk for his presentation and welcomed the application which again covers both terrestrial and marine zones and is the first one on the Black Sea. It instructed the Secretariat to organise a visit to the region and asked the expert to examine in greater depth the visitor's management and the recreational pressures on the area, also in relation to the Dolphinarum. In addition, the members of the Group were interested to learn more about the results of such a long-term scientific surveillance of wildlife and their habitats in the area.

## **6. Applications for the European Diploma of Protected Areas received in 2012 and results of the on-the-spot appraisals**

### **6.1 Khosrov Forest Reserve (Armenia)**

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE (2013)06

The expert, Hervé Lethier (Switzerland), presented the findings of his visit. He underlined that the area meets the general criteria for the award of the European diploma and comprises representative elements of biological and landscape heritage which are of exceptional European importance (containing species and habitats protected under the Bern Convention). He added that the area offers magnificent wild and anthropogenic types of natural and cultural landscapes which are typical from this part of Europe.

Although the budget of the Reserve has been stable through the years, it is rather low and certainly not sufficient to cover all tasks of the site administration properly. In addition, tourism activities should be developed but only in a way to uphold the European interest and sensitivity of the site, and to preserve its integrity. Public access should be regulated in such a way as to channel the visitors and avoid damage to the biological and landscape features of the area. In addition, waste management is a problem and it is recommended that awareness-raising activities are strengthened and take place among the staff of the Reserve and the local populations located in the buffer zone of the area. A last issue encountered is the situation of the water pumping of the Azat and Vedi rivers.

The Group agreed that the exceptional European interest of the area is confirmed and agreed with the two conditions and recommendations proposed by the expert. Further to the discussions on water pumping and grazing activities, the group decided to add an additional sixth recommendation to the Draft resolution, namely “to renew the management plan for 2015 onwards, including a grazing plan and updating the socio-economic activities within the Reserve”. The draft resolution is included in Appendix III.

## **6.2 Burren Region (Ireland)**

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE (2012)016

The expert, Mr Sneeep, presented the results of his appraisal to The Burren. The Burren Region is the largest limestone landscape in Europe with a very rich biodiversity (over 70% of Ireland’s native flora, over 100 species of breeding birds, bat species, over 70 species of land snail, etc.) and with unique archaeological, geological, historical and cultural values.

The expert confirmed the outstanding European interest of the area, stressing that enough legal regulations conserving the natural and cultural values of area exist for the Burren. One of the main features of area is the successful and unique management practices and the full involvement of the farming and other local communities. The farming community has successfully farmed The Burren’s rocky hills for many generations and a blue print for sustainable farming in The Burren has been developed. The expert further underlined the quality of the Burren Farming for Conservation Programme and its successful implementation. He strongly recommended the award of the European Diploma to the area, with some conditions and recommendations.

The Group discussed the application and the expert findings and agreed that the area holds exceptional interest in line with the requirements of the European Diploma. The Group agreed with the conditions and recommendations proposed for the award of the European Diploma and decided that the Burren communities contributing to the management of the area should also be praised for their impressive contribution by adding a clause to this effect in the draft Resolution, which is included in Appendix III.

## **7. Exceptional visits and renewals of the European Diploma**

### **7.1 Exceptional visit to the Poloniny National park (Slovakia)**

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE(2013)05

As per the decision of the Group of Specialists from 2012, an exceptional visit in the frame of Article 8 of the Regulation of the European Diploma took place in Slovakia (October 2012). The objective of the visit was the address the difficulties encountered by the Slovak authorities in implementing the conditions adopted with the last renewal of the Diploma, dating from 2008 and requesting the adoption of a new management plan for the area by 2010.

A member of the Bern Convention Secretariat and an independent expert (Mr Hervé Lethier) visited the diploma holding area as well as attending an inter-ministerial meeting which gathered together representatives of the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Use. During the visit on-the-spot the expert concluded that there is very little progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the last renewal and well as no progress with the implementation of the main condition relating the adoption of a new management plan. In addition, the issue of failing to manage the forest in a sustainable way is considered as continuing, as is the issue of illegal hunting and poaching.

Mr. L  thier further stressed that there is a clear need for a strengthened cooperation between all relevant ministries at national, but also local, levels and an urgent need for strengthening the legal capacity of the Park Administration to manage the area.

The Group discussed the report of the expert and thanked the Slovak authorities for showing some positive signs by organising an inter-ministerial meeting during the on-the-spot visit. However, taking into account the long-term absence of a management plan for the area, and the additional serious issues reported by the expert, the Group decided to adopt an opinion for the attention of both the Slovak authorities and the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.

The draft opinion advises the Standing Committee to request the Slovak authorities to take the appropriate measures to implement the conditions within a period of one year. If the necessary measures are not taken within the period allocated, the Standing Committee is advised to recommend the withdrawal of the European Diploma before the end of its period of validity. The draft opinion is included in Appendix IV.

## **8. Renewal of the European Diploma**

### **8.1 Retezat National Park (Romania)**

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE(2013)03

The expert, Pierre Galland (Switzerland), presented the results of his visit to Retezat. The visit took place in the frame of a first renewal of the European Diploma following its award in 2008. He confirmed that the Park still holds its European assets, such as remarkable landscapes and very diverse and high biodiversity. The presence of many virgin or semi-virgin forests is noted as well as the fact that they are very well preserved. The protection of the area is sustainable thanks to a good management plan and effective organisation.

Mr. Galland also informed the meeting that a new management plan for the area was prepared, covering the period 2012 – 2021. It was submitted to the Ministry for formal approval in the spring 2012 and should be adopted officially soon. In addition 5 years action plans will be prepared and implemented. The expert recommended the renewal of the European Diploma, without any condition, but with a few recommendations, in particular for an increase of the budget allocated to the Park, as well as for an improved monitoring of the pastures in order to identify early possible changes due to overgrazing and/or under-grazing. He recommended that further studies are foreseen on the issue of gazing.

The Group thanked the expert who carried out the appraisal visit and agreed with his proposal to renew the European Diploma to the Retezat National Park, underlying the need for a quick official adoption of the revised management plan and for the need for careful monitoring of the gazing activities in the area.

## **9. Annual reports of the areas holding the Diploma for 2012**

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE(2013)09

The Secretariat explained that 51 out of 70 annual reports had been submitted. There were some very important delays in the submission some of the reports arriving only one to two weeks before the meeting of the Group of Specialists. Although no mention of major problems was identified, one remark was common to most of the reports – the lack of sufficient and often decreasing financial resources allocated for the diploma holding areas, including late arrival of budget provisions jeopardizing the appropriate and agreed management of the areas.

Partly due to a lack of sufficient human resources in the Secretariat and partly to the late arrival of some of the reports or incomplete information provided in them, the Secretariat considered it important to proceed to a more streamlined analysis of the annual reports. The Secretariat carried out an examination of the conditions attached to the 2011 renewals of the European Diploma, checking the implementation of all strict conditions adopted with its award or renewal. Support was also received

from the members of the Group, which have examined the annual reports from the diploma holding areas in their respective countries.

The following areas have been identified as requiring special attention:

- Bialowieza National Park (Poland) whose award had been suspended in 2007: the procedure for adopting the management plan is still not completed.

The Group instructed the Secretariat to request more information on the current developments for its next meeting in 2014.

- Abruzzi National Park (Italy), where the issue of the official adoption at national level of the management plan is still pending. It was noted that the management plan had been agreed at regional level. The discussion at the meeting was held with input from a representative of the Park. The Group noted that the situation is most likely to have resulted from the political instability of the country.

The Group decided to closely follow whether the plan is adopted in the very near future as foreseen in the Resolution of the renewal of the Diploma. It expressed its deep concern with the situation where the area is left without a legally binding management plan, an essential requirement by the European Diploma regulation. In case no significant development is noted in the year to come, the Group will draft an opinion for the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention at its next meeting.

The Chair of the Group presented document T-PVS/DE(2013)09, in which he proposes a revised and simplified version of the Model form for the submission of annual reports by the diploma holding areas. The aim of the paper was to introduce a simple form of reporting, focussing on the implementation of any conditions and on progress towards fulfilling the recommendations, in the majority of years. Full reports would be required in the year before renewals were to be considered. Discussion focussed on whether there were even more simple forms of reports, for example using a 'traffic lights' system. Such a system would allocate green to conditions/recommendations which had been fully implemented, yellow or orange to those in progress, and red to those where either no progress or little progress were apparent.

The Group decided to implement the simple form of reporting on a trial basis. The system outlined in Appendix B of paper T-PVS/DE(2013)09 would form the basis of the trial. The results would be assessed by the Group of Experts after the trial had been running for one or two years. It was hoped that, with this simple system, all diploma holding areas would submit their reports on time and that the Secretariat would be able to complete its analysis of the reports in time for the following meeting of the Group of Experts.

## **10. Renewals foreseen for 2014**

The Secretariat informed the meeting that since the validity period had been extended in 2008 to 10 years, there was only one renewal visit to be carried out in 2013 with a view to the possible renewal of the European Diploma in 2014 and that was to Central Balkan National Park in Bulgaria.

## **11. Celebration of the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma**

The Secretariat informed the Group that, as decided at the previous meeting, contacts have been made for finding a location for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma. Further to a proposal received some time ago by the Italian diploma holding area of Parc Migliarino San Rossore



Massaciucoli, the management authorities of the park confirmed their interest in holding an event for the occasion, agreeing to cover the accommodation of 60 participants and provide the necessary meeting room. The area seems to be very suitable for the event, as it is rich in cultural and archaeological heritage, in addition to the natural heritage. There was also discussion about whether a meeting of the managers of the diploma holding areas was the optimal method of raising the profile of the European Diploma. It was considered that it would be useful for a parallel programme of national events to be held, raising the values of the European Diploma in every country which contains at least one diploma holding area.

The Group recognised that preparing for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations is a priority for the European Diploma agenda, as the event provides the opportunity for raising awareness and improving the visibility of the Diploma. It instructed the Secretariat (1) to prepare a publication presenting the Diploma holding areas, to be sent to every MEP and Member State of the Council of Europe, (2) to contact all managers of diploma holding areas asking for their contribution to identifying the most burning issues and up-to-date topics that they want to see on the agenda of the meeting organised for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ED, and (3) to recommend to the signatories of the Bern Convention that a programme of national events be held to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

## **12. Date of the next meeting, other business and closure of the meeting**

The Secretariat would notify members of the dates of the next meeting, to be held in 2014, in due course.

The Secretariat thanked the members leaving the Group of Specialists at the end of the meeting (Russian Federation and France), including the Chair, Prof Usher (UK), for their great contribution to the European Diploma and its strategic development and visibility. The Secretariat warmly thanked the Chair for his hard work and dedication during the past four years and wished that the cooperation with all three members of the Group continues in the future.

The Chair also thanked the out-going members of the Group and wished success both to the new members who will come to replace them in the composition of the Group and to the current three other members who will ensure the transition period (Estonia, Slovenia and Turkey).

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair.

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## Appendix II – Agenda

<b>THURSDAY 26 March 2013</b>
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### 9h30-09h50 Welcome and Opening

1. Opening of the meeting by the Chair, Mr Michael Usher (United Kingdom)
2. Adoption of the agenda  
[Document T-PVS/DE (2013)1]
3. General information on activities presenting an interest for the work of the Group
4. Short presentation by the Chair of the minutes of the 2012 meeting of the Group of specialists and report on actions undertaken during the last year  
[Document T-PVS/DE (2012)15]

### 09h50-10h45 Applications for the European Diploma received in 2013

5. Applications for the European Diploma of Protected Areas: presentation by the representatives of areas candidates of the application files (Desertas Islands Nature Reserve, Portugal and Karadag Nature Reserve, Ukraine) [25 minutes each]  
[Document T-PVS/DE (2013)04]  
[Document T-PVS/DE (2013)07]

### 10h45-11h00 Coffee break

### 11h00-12h30 Applications for the European Diploma received in 2012

6. Applications for the award of the European Diploma: result of the on-the-spot appraisals, discussion and proposals to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers:  
[Document T-PVS/DE (2013)08]
  - Khosrov Forest Reserve (Armenia), *Mr Hervé Lethier* [11h00 – 11h45]  
[Document T-PVS/DE (2013)06]
  - Burren region (Ireland), *Mr Jan-Willem Sneep* [11h45 – 12h30]  
[Document T-PVS/DE (2012)16]

### 12h30-14h00 Lunch break

### 14h00-15h00 Exceptional visits and renewals of the European Diploma

7. Exceptional visits: result of the on-the-spot appraisal:
  - Poloniny National Park (Slovakia), *Mr Hervé Lethier* [14h00 – 14h30]  
[Document T-PVS/DE (2013)05]
8. Renewal of the European Diploma: results of the on-the-spot appraisal, discussion and proposals to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers:

- Retezat National park (Romania), *Mr Pierre Galland* [14h30 – 15h00]

[Document T-PVS/DE (2013)03]

### **15h00-16h00 Annual reports**

- 9. Annual reports: Brief presentation of a synthesis by the Secretariat and discussion of reports which need special attention.

[Document T-PVS/DE (2013)09]

### **16h00-16h20 Coffee break**

### **16h20-16h35 Renewal 2014**

- 10. Renewal foreseen in 2014: first renewal to the Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria)

### **16h35-17h15 Celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Diploma**

- 11. Presentation of proposals for hosting the meeting, discussion and exchange of ideas

### **17h15-17h30 Other business and closure of the meeting**

- 12. Date of the next meeting

- 13. Other business

- 14. Closure

### Appendix III – Draft Resolutions 2013



#### **Draft Resolution on the award of the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the Khosrov Forest Reserve (Armenia)**

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 on the European Diploma for certain protected landscapes, reserves and natural features, as amended by Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 on the revised Regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas;

Having regard to the proposals of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention;

Taking into consideration the expert's report presented at the meeting of the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma of Protected Areas on 26 March 2013;

Having noted the agreement of the Government of Armenia;

Solemnly awards the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the Khosrov Forest Reserve (Armenia), recognising the European significance of the Reserve which has remarkable landscapes, very diverse habitats and a high biodiversity, large areas of very interesting and significant virgin or semi-virgin forests of different types, long-term protection and a good management plan and organisation;

Places the aforesaid area under the patronage of the Council of Europe until ... July 2018;

Attaches the following 2 conditions to the award:

1. the Armenian authorities should take the necessary action to ensure that the existing water resources facilities will not be expanded within the area and that they will stay fully compatible with the preservation of the European interest of the area; and
2. public motor vehicle traffic, including for transportation of tourists, will be strictly forbidden on the existing gravel roads within the area except for management purposes and in case of emergencies.

Attaches the following 6 recommendations, for the Forest Reserve Authorities, to the award:

1. to develop appropriate efforts for preventing and minimizing illegal activities, including poaching of large mammals within the Reserve;
2. to develop and implement awareness and training activities for local people, visitors and members of the staff of the Reserve, particularly in relation to the management of litter and wastes;
3. to implement the sustainable tourism strategy fully and to monitor these activities;
4. to pursue inventories and mapping of species and habitats, not only in the Emerald network but preferably in the whole territory of the Reserve;

5. with the Armenian authorities, to guarantee the budget of the Reserve; and
6. to renew the management plan for 2015 onwards, including a grazing plan and updating the socio-economic activities within the Reserve.





**Draft resolution on the award of the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the Burren Region (Ireland)**

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 for certain protected landscapes, reserves and natural features, as amended by Resolution CM/ResDip (2008)1 on the Regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas;

Having regard to the proposals of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention;

Taking into consideration the expert's report presented at the meeting of the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma of Protected Areas on 26 March 2013;

Having noted the agreement of the Government of Ireland;

Having noted the impressive partnership working between the Irish national authorities, the local authorities of Counties Clare and Galway, the farmers of the Burren Region, and the community of people living and working in the Burren Region;

Solemnly awards the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the Burren Region (Ireland), recognising the European significance of the park which is the largest limestone landscape in Europe with a very rich biodiversity and with unique archaeological, geological, historical and cultural values, enough legal regulations conserving the natural and cultural values of The Burren;

Places the aforesaid area under the patronage of the Council of Europe until ... July 2018;

Attaches the following 2 conditions to the award:

1. The Irish authorities should ensure the budget for the maintenance and development of The Burren Farming for Conservation Programme;
2. The national and local authorities should prevent possible negative environmental damage from the surrounding areas of the Burren Region.

Attaches the following 6 recommendations, for the national and local authorities and the Burren Region community, to the award:

1. to encourage the participation of more farmers in The Burren Farming for Conservation Programme;
2. to provide next steps in the second phase of EU funding of The Burrenlife project;
3. to stimulate the further development of The Burren Community Charter;
4. to stimulate further development of sustainable ecotourism and practice in the Burren Region;

5. to oppose mass tourism in the Burren Region which does not accord with the principles of sustainable development; and
6. to encourage volunteers to participate in the sustainable management of the Burren Region.



**Draft Resolution on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to the Retezat National Park (Romania)**

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 on the European Diploma for certain protected landscapes, reserves and natural features, as amended by Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 on the revised Regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas;

Having regard to Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)2 awarding the European Diploma to the Retezat National Park;

Having regard to the proposals of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention;

Taking into consideration the expert's report presented at the meeting of the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma of Protected Areas on 26 March 2013;

Renews the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the Retezat National Park until 2 July 2023;

Attaches the following 6 recommendations to the renewal:

1. the Romanian authorities should secure a sufficient budget for the National Park and allocate the funds early enough to in the year, in order to allow ensuring favourable working conditions for the staff, finishing and maintaining the Park's infrastructure, increasing the information for visitor and improving the tourist facilities;
2. the competent Romanian authorities should work together to harmonize the different national and international designations in order to achieve an efficient joint management and to realize joint scientific research and monitoring programmes;
3. the Management Plan should be approved as soon as possible, and at least an executive summary be translated into either English or French;
4. the park, in close collaboration with Salvamont (which is legally responsible) should maintain or renew, when necessary, the tourist infrastructure (trail marking, information signs, etc.); a particular effort should be made to solve the problems of the toilets in the camping areas and near the huts;
5. the Park should maintain pressure on local communities to prevent construction of inappropriate buildings either in the park and in its immediate vicinity; and
6. the park rangers should monitor the pastures in order to identify early possible changes due to overgrazing and/or under-grazing; before the next evaluation, the Park should repeat the pastures' study; the changes in terms of species composition, erosion, etc., should be analysed in relation to the type and amount of grazing.

## **Appendix IV – Opinion of the Group of Experts for the European Diploma on the Poloniny National Park**

### **Opinion**

#### **of the Group of Experts for the European Diploma following the extraordinary appraisal report on the Poloniny National Park**

After examining the report drawn up by the independent expert following the extraordinary appraisal, the aims of which were to visit the Diploma-holding area (1) in order to analyse the difficulties encountered in implementing the conditions attached to the last renewal in 2008 and (2) to discuss the issues encountered with the local stakeholders, the Group of Experts:

1. takes note of the conclusions of the report by the independent expert and the time-frame it provides for the adoption of protective measures by national authorities;
2. notes the work being done by the National Park's staff;
3. recognises that all Diploma-holding areas should demonstrate exemplary management practices;
4. gauges the seriousness of the situation, particularly in respect of the long-term absence of a management plan for the Poloniny National Park;
5. regrets that no official response was received from the national authorities, since the time that the extraordinary appraisal took place, regarding the endorsement of a pilot-project to be developed in cooperation between the relevant Ministries (Environment, Agriculture and Land Use);
6. considers that it is appropriate for the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention to recommend to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe that it requests the Slovak authorities to take the appropriate measures to implement the conditions within a period of one year; and
7. strongly advises that, if the necessary measures are not taken within the period allocated, the Standing Committee recommends the withdrawal of the European Diploma before the end of its period of validity.