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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND NATURAL
HABITATS

Standing Committee

34th meeting
Strasbourg, 2-5 December 2014

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

*Document prepared by the
Democratic Governance Directorate*

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Table of Contents

1.	Report of the meeting	3
2.	Appendix I: List of participants.....	16
3.	Appendix II: Agenda	19
4.	Appendix III: Draft Resolutions for the award of the ED in 2014.....	21
5.	Appendix IV: Opinion in view of the renewal of the ED.....	24

Report of the meeting

The Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas met in Strasbourg on 24 March 2014. 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 examination and possible adoption, the draft Resolutions (Appendix III) on the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas to the following areas:
 - Desertas Nature Reserve (Portugal),
 - Karadag Nature Reserve (Ukraine);
- Consider, with a view to forwarding to the Committee of Ministers, for examination and possible adoption, the draft amendments to Appendix 5 to Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1;
- Take note of the opinion of the Group of Specialists (Appendix IV) following the on-the-spot appraisal in view of the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria).

1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened on Monday 24 March by the Chair, Mr Peter Skoberne (Slovenia) and Mr Eladio Fernandez-Galiano, Head of the Democratic Initiatives Department.

The Chair welcomed the members of the Group, the experts, the representatives of the areas and the members of the Secretariat (list of participants available in Appendix I). The Chair warmly thanked Ms Iva Obretenova, who is leaving the Secretariat of the Group, for her work with the Group, and he welcomed Ms Tatiana State Masson who joined the Secretariat.

Mr Eladio Fernandez-Galiano welcomed all the participants to the meeting. He reminded that in 2015 there is the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma for Protected Areas and that the Secretariat is looking on how to better prepare this celebration.

2. Adoption of the agenda

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE (2014) 1

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

3. General information on activities of the Bern Convention presenting an interest for the work of the Group

The Secretariat provided information on the various meetings taking place in the frame of the Bern Convention and its Groups of Experts, detailing the topics dealt with. The calendar of activities can be consulted at the address: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/nature/calendar2014_EN.asp

4. Short presentation by the Chair of the minutes of the meeting of the Group in 2013 and report on actions undertaken during the last year

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE (2013) 10

The Chair briefly described the outcomes of the work of the Group during 2013 and reminded of the discussions held on the various diploma holding areas. Eventually, the Chair mentioned the new form for annual reports presented by the former Chair of the Group and the Secretariat, and the discussion around the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma, as both topics are on the agenda of the current meeting of the Group.

5. Applications for the award of the European Diploma: results of the on-the-spot appraisals, discussion and proposals to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

▪ Desertas Nature Reserve (Portugal)

Relevant documents: T-PVS/DE(2013) 4; T-PVS/DE (2014) 3 and T-PVS/DE (2014) 6

The expert, Mr Joe Sultana (Malta), presented the findings of his visit. The expert highlighted that this small group of three Macaronesian islands of volcanic origin are not only of great ecological importance for the region and Europe, but also at an international level, and are regarded as of world heritage importance. He listed flora and fauna examples which highlight the importance of the islands to European and World biodiversity.

Mr Sultana noted that there are various ongoing conservation projects to protect the habitats and species of the reserve, such as surveillance and protection of the islands from sea and from land, aiding the recovery of the plant cover and the propagation of native plants of Deserta Grande and Bugio, preventing the introduction and elimination of alien species (goats, rabbits and mice). Protecting and monitoring the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) is one of the main ongoing projects in the Islands.

The expert added that the area of the Nature Reserve is included in the Natura 2000 network and since the beginning of March 2014, there has been an increase of the classified area, and thus improvement of its legal framework.

Mr Paulo Oliveira, representative of the Desertas Nature Reserve, answered members' questions and thanked Mr Sultana for his passion and encouragements he transmitted to the reserve's staff.

The Group agreed that the exceptional European interest of the area is confirmed.

Further to the discussions on the proposed conditions and recommendations, the Group decided to indicate a deadline for the updating of the management plan, to change the condition on the monitoring system into a recommendation, and proposed to be more ambitious on the eradication of the goats. The draft resolution is included in Appendix III.

▪ **Karadag Nature Reserve (Ukraine)**

Relevant documents: T-PVS/DE(2013) 7; T-PVS/DE (2014) 2; T-PVS/DE (2014) 6 and T-PVS/DE (2014) 9

The Secretariat reminded the Council of Europe's recognition of the full territorial integrity of Ukraine, including Crimea, where the Karadag reserve is located.

The expert, Mr Hervé Lethier (Switzerland), presented the findings of his visit. He reminded that the Karadag Nature Reserve is located in Ukraine, in the South Eastern part of Crimea, at around 150 km from Simferopol, in the Sudak district, along the Black Sea coast. The marine and coastal parts of the reserve were designated wetland of international importance by Ramsar in 2004; Karadag is also identified as an international bird area and has been nominated for the Emerald network.

The expert emphasised the biological heritage of the reserve and mentioned some of the hosted species, among which there are flora species listed in Annex I, and fauna species listed in Annex II to the Bern Convention. He also highlighted the geological and landscape interests of the reserve and stressed on the importance of the reserve's ancient library.

The tourists' access is very strict and only on defined paths, yet the tourism pressure around the nominated area is very high and growing from year to year. The expert further identified other internal and external threats: illegal uses and recreational activities, fire risk, coastal erosion and degradation of the marine ecosystem, invasive alien species and local socio-economic development. A management plan for 2005-2015 was adopted for the nominated area, however, a new management plan should be adopted by the State party in the nearest future, covering at least the period of time for which the diploma can be awarded.

Mr Lethier concluded that the Karadag Nature Reserve meets the criteria to be awarded the European Diploma.

Mr Volodymyr Maltsev, representative of the reserve, presented the Group the management plan for 2014-2019. Mr Ivanenko, member of the Group from Ukraine, thanked the expert for his report and recommendations. He acknowledged that the authorities prepared the draft of the new management plan that was discussed at local level, and they are ready to adopt it after including possible recommendations from the Group's meeting.

The Group agreed that the exceptional European interest of the area is confirmed.

Further to the discussions, the Group decided to indicate "end 2015" as deadline for the adoption of the management plan and agreed on the proposed conditions and recommendations. The draft resolution is included in Appendix III.

6. Renewal of the European Diploma: results of the on-the-spot appraisal, discussion and proposals to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

▪ **Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria)**

Relevant documents: T-PVS/DE (2014) 4 and T-PVS/DE (2014) 6

The expert, Mr Pierre Galland (Switzerland), presented the results of his visit to the Central Balkan National Park in Bulgaria. The park, located in the central part of the Stara Planina mountain range, belongs to IUCN cat II. Since 2003, it has been holding the PANParks certificate, which was renewed in 2010. Four of the nine strict reserves have been on the world list of the UNESCO MaB Biosphere Reserves since the early 80's. The park and its surrounding area is part of the Natura 2000 network. The

whole territory is "exclusive state property", which corresponds to the requirement for a National Park according to the Bulgarian legislation.

Mr Galland briefly presented the flora of interest of the park (2/3 forests, 1/3 upland meadows), and the fauna for which the dense and well preserved forests still offer suitable habitats. He also mentioned the socio-economic activities and the rich cultural heritage of the park and its surrounding, and highlighted that in general the park, its habitats, species and landscape are very well preserved.

The expert also underlined the good work of the park's staff. However, the current level of financing is not sufficient to ensure quality management operation and infrastructure maintenance. The former director has left her position in 2013 and was temporarily replaced by the deputy-director. The procedure for selection of a new director has started at the end of September 2013; one of the senior park staff is currently acting director, but with very limited responsibilities.

The management plan of the area is currently being renewed. Mr Galland warned that strong pressure could be expected to increase the charge in cattle grazing, as well as for public use of park roads. The problem of off-road vehicles is also a very delicate issue.

To conclude, Mr Galland recommended that the renewal for the regular 10 year period should be envisaged only after there is a satisfactory new management plan adopted.

The Group expressed the disappointment that no representative of the authorities attended the meeting.

After debate, the Group advised that the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Central Balkan National Park be suspended, until a new management plan for the area is formally adopted. The complete opinion of the Group is included in Appendix IV.

7. Information on new application to be received in 2014

▪ Vashlovani Protected Areas (Georgia)

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE (2014) 8

The application for the European Diploma was sent to the Bern Convention secretariat by the Agency for Protected Areas of Georgia.

Mr Rati Japaridze, Chairman of the Agency of Protected Areas in Georgia, presented the areas and their special combination of biologic, geologic and landscape diversity, with unique natural undisturbed landscapes and historic-cultural monuments. The region of Vashlovani Protected Areas, located in the extreme eastern part of Georgia, is the driest and the most waterless territory in the country. The 5 different zones in the protected areas include desert, semi-desert, steps, arid sparse forest and deciduous forest, where out of 600 flora species are recorded. Vashlovani Protected Areas, and especially Vashlovani reserve, are the living environment and shelter of many animals (bear, boar, wolf, fox, jackal, rabbit, badger), including critically endangered and rare species (striped hyena, lynx, otter, snake eagle, Eurasian black vulture, griffon vulture, black stork, Mediterranean turtle).

Mr Japaridze further presented examples of on-going projects implemented in the area such as sustainable management of pastures and gazelle reintroduction. Answering questions from the Group members, he informed that there is no hunting but only amateur fishing, and that patrolling of territory takes place daily. A management plan was adopted in 2011.

The Group welcomed the first application from Georgia and appreciated the quality of the protected areas. It asked that a visit be carried out to confirm the outstanding nature of the areas and ensure that they meet the criteria laid down in the rules.

The Group asked the expert to give special attention to the management of the grazing and of the human activity inside the area, and to the measures undertaken to control the hunting and the poaching. In addition, the members of the Group were interested to learn more about the reintroduction of the gazelle.

8. Annual reports: presentation of the overall analysis by the Secretariat

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE(2014) 5

The Secretariat reminded the objectives of the annual report and the Group's mandate related to it, which are defined by the Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 on the revised regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas.

The Secretariat further informed that the purpose of the analysis was to examine the 2013 annual reports received, and more specifically the information on measures implemented to comply with the conditions and/or recommendations for the award or the renewal of the European Diploma (chapter III of the annual report). 45 out of 69 annual reports had been submitted. There were some very important delays in the submission, some of the reports arrived only a few days before the meeting of the Group of Specialists.

The section below reviews the information provided in the annual reports for 2013 of a first set of areas, presenting notable or some progress in the implementation of the conditions and recommendations attached to their renewal or award Resolution, or for which warnings have been identified. The Diploma holding areas in need of particular attention are presented in the item 9 of the agenda.

- **The Peak District National Park (United Kingdom)** informed that the area management plan is completed and the strategies are aligned accordingly.

The Group welcomed the completion of the national park management plan.

- **The Swiss National Park (Switzerland)** celebrates its 100-year jubilee in 2014. The Secretariat identified a warning on the implementation of the recommendation 1 which requires to "take all necessary measures to fulfil the UNESCO condition that the national park, which is the core zone of the "Biosfera Val Müstair/Parc Naziunal" biosphere reserve, is entirely surrounded by a buffer zone".

The Group welcomed the activities organised in the frame of the 100th anniversary of the area and encouraged the Chair or one of the other members to attend the official ceremony on the 1st August 2014. The Group decided to keep under observation the progress on the achievement of measures to fulfil the UNESCO condition that the national park be entirely surrounded by a buffer zone.

- Regarding **the Wollmatinger Ried Untersee-Gnadensee Nature Reserve (Germany)**, the Secretariat identified four renewal recommendations (2, 4, 5 and 6) that should be kept under observation.

The Group encouraged the German authorities to approach their Swiss counterpart in order to install a dialogue for co-operation, in line with recommendation 4 of their renewal Resolution. The Group decided to closely follow the implementation of the recommendations and to discuss the topic again at its next meeting in 2015.

- **The Boschplaat Nature Reserve (Netherlands)** raised concerns over the budget available for the area, particularly the budget for monitoring. No reference was made to the implementation of the other four recommendations of the renewal Resolution.

The Group decided to keep under observation the progress on the implementation of the measures. A special attention should be given to the budget for monitoring.

- **The Kuşçenneti (Bird Paradise) National Park (Turkey)** informed that the Lake Manyas (Kuş) Management Plan is being implemented properly (condition 1); the same information is provided by both the 2012 and 2013 annual reports.

The Group welcomed the implementation of the management plan and asked for updated data in the 2014 annual report.

- **The Minsmere Nature Reserve (United Kingdom)** informed that the last management plan was extended and the preparation of the new management plan 2014-2019 is in progress.

The Group welcomed the development of formal and informal learning activities and considered that this positive experience could be used as best practices for other areas playing a role of demonstration site for a wide range of audiences, especially formal education. The Group further decided to keep under observation the advancement of the new management plan 2014-2019.

- **The Purbeck Heritage Coast (United Kingdom)**

The Group appreciated the continuous good management of the area.

- **The Doñana National Park (Spain)**

The Group greeted the fruitful exchanges between the Doñana National Park and the Camargue National Reserve (France).

- **The Store Mosse National Park (Sweden)** wrongly communicated the progress made on the implementation of recommendations attached to the old Resolution ResDip(2003)7 concerning the renewal of the European Diploma to the park until 13 June 2008.

The Group requested that the 2014 annual report is updated with the progress made on the implementation of recommendations of the current CM/ResDip(2008)14 Resolution.

- **The Bullerö and Långviksskär Nature Reserves (Sweden)**

The Group decided to keep under observation the update of the management plans for the two nature reserves.

- **The Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve (Germany)**

The Group decided to keep under observation the implementation of the recommendations.

- **The Ecrins National Park (France)** informed on the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the park in 2013.

The Group greeted the managers of the area for the work on the implementation of the recommendations, as well as for the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the park. The Group further decided to ask the 2014 annual report updated with the implementation of the recommendation 9 which requires to better reconciling the return of major predators with stock-keeping activities, and was not referred to by the 2013 annual report.

- **The Maremma Regional Park (Italy)**

The Group welcomed the fact that “the Park works daily to improve and to develop this protected area, which represents one of the most important parks in Tuscany and the main protected area in the Provincia of Grosseto”, as mentioned in the annual report. The Group decided to keep under observation the finalisation of the extension of the park, in order to include the marine environment under conditions which should be decided in agreement with local players (recommendation 2).

- **The Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve (Portugal)** acknowledged the fulfilment of the condition attached to the renewal of its Diploma, concerning the legal status of the reserve.

The Group decided to keep under observation the advancement in the implementation of the recommendations.

- **The Oka National Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation)** informed that there were no changes in the ownership of the reserve and thus, no changes in the reserve’s current protected status (condition).

The Group decided to keep under observation the progress on the measures implementations and to ask for information on the implementation of the recommendations concerning the Desman habitats (recommendations 2 and 4).

▪ **The Ipolytarnóc Protected Area (Hungary)**

The Group decided to follow the implementation of recommendation 3 concerning the replacement with an underground cable of the power line which runs between the village and the visitor centre.

▪ **The Szénás Hills Protected Area (Hungary)**

The Group greeted the good information policy for visitors.

▪ **The Berezinsky State Biosphere Reserve (Belarus)**

The Group welcomed the co-operation with other international bodies, especially to promote the reserve image and to attract additional finances, and also in the framework of international projects.

▪ **The De Weerribben Nature Reserve (Netherlands)** wrongly communicated the progress made on the implementation of the recommendations attached to the old Resolution ResDip(2005)15 concerning the renewal of the European Diploma to the Reserve until 11 September 2010.

The Group's decision is reported under item 10 of the agenda.

▪ **The Seitsemien National Park (Finland)** does not inform on the implementation of the new master plan, subject of the main condition attached to its renewal Resolution.

The Group decided to ask for more and precise information concerning the implementation of the management plan and the possible need of a new updated management plan (condition). It further decided to ask for information on the results of the management effectiveness evaluations (report on the state of the parks) which should be made at regular five-year intervals (recommendation 1) and on the restoration plans for both mires and forests (recommendation 2).

▪ **The Bieszczady National Park (Poland)**

The Group decided to closely follow the final adoption of the protection plan of the Bieszczady National Park for 2011-2030.

▪ **The Dobročský National Nature Reserve (Slovak Republic)** wrongly refers to the progress made on the implementation of the condition and recommendations attached to the old Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)19. Hopefully, as the two Resolutions attach identical condition and recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma, the 2013 annual report is not meaningless.

The Group welcomed the developments done and the work for the 100th anniversary of protection of the National Nature Reserve Dobročský prales and the National Nature Reserve Badínský prales.

▪ **The Tsentralno-Chernozemny Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation)**

The Group greeted the expansion of the "zapovednik"'s territory with the creation of a biosphere range "Steppe" in Kursk area, and the selection of the reserve as one of the 4 pilot territories chosen for the Steppe Project.

▪ **The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (Romania)** informed on the progress in the implementation of the recommendations attached to its renewal, more particularly in the financing of new projects. The Secretariat identified as warning the status of the project proposal on the Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013 (recommendation 1) which is still under evaluation, what was already the case in 2012.

The Group encouraged the efforts to move forward with the evaluation of the proposals and to build up the required international co-operation with Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, in order to implement recommendation 1 concerning the process of co-ordinating the ecological management of the delta system. This should be kept under observation.

The Group acknowledged the efforts deployed by the authorities of the reserve on fund raising (recommendations 10, 11 and 12); the Group further invited them to explore the possibility to reactivate the co-operation with other European Diploma sites which are deltas (Camargue National Reserve (France) and Donana National Park (Spain)) (recommendation 2).

- **The Podyjí National Park (Czech Republic)** informed that the management plan for the period 2010-2019 was already adopted (recommendation 2) and its implementation is in progress.

The Secretariat of the Bern Convention has been informed about the development plans of the Austrian Federal Forests aiming at the construction of a large wind turbines park in Northern Austria in the close vicinity of two National Parks Thayatal (Austria) and Podyji (Czech Republic).

The Group appreciated that the management plan for 2010-2019 was already adopted and that its implementation is in progress. It also greeted the efforts of the working group to reduce the negative impacts on the nature, caused by fishery on the Czech side of the Dyje river.

The Group decided to keep under observation the progress on the negotiations with the owner of hydropower plant Vranov, started in order to ensure ecologically bearable flows under Vranov reservoir (recommendation 1). Additionally, it decided to follow the co-operation with the Thayatal National Park to harmonise the fishing regulations within the two parks (recommendation 4).

The Group further instructed the Secretariat to organise an exceptional visit of an expert to both the Podyji National Park and the bordering Thayatal National Park, in the frame of Article 8 of the Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1, in order to help identifying the possible negative impact on threatened species and habitats, due to the possible construction of large wind turbines park(s) in Northern Austria, and in addition to evaluate the issue on the fishing regulations within the two parks and the management of the Vranov dam.

- **The Thayatal National Park (Austria)** wrongly referred to the progress made on the implementation of the recommendations of the old Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)5. Hopefully, the two Resolutions attach identical recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma, so the 2013 annual report is not meaningless.

The Secretariat of the Bern Convention has been informed about the development plans of the Austrian Federal Forests aiming at the construction of a large wind turbines park in Northern Austria in the close vicinity of two National Parks Thayatal (Austria) and Podyji (Czech Republic).

The Group appreciated the co-operation between the two parks in the framework of common goals and incited them to go forward and undertake to translate into action the proposed measures of the study on the ecology of the Thaya river and how it is affected by the Vranov Dam operations (recommendation 1).

The Group instructed the Secretariat to organise an exceptional visit of an expert to both Thayatal National Park and the bordering Podyji National Park, in the frame of Article 8 of the Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1, in order to help identifying the possible negative impact on threatened species and habitats, due to the possible construction of large wind turbines park(s) in Northern Austria, and in addition to evaluate the issue on the fishing regulations within the two parks and the management of the Vranov dam.

- **The Matsalu National Park (Estonia)**

The Group decided to ask for further information on the implementation of the conditions and the recommendations, more specifically concerning the funds availability for the management of the national park (condition 3) and the possible development of private open land (condition 4). The Group decided to equally ask for details on the support provided to local people within the park's boundaries, in developing activities compatible with the aims of the park (recommendation 2) and on the monitoring of potential external threats from industry, agriculture, tourism and development (recommendation 3).

▪ **The Volcanic Phenomena of the Tihany Peninsula (Hungary)**

The Group welcomed the positive developments and encouraged the authorities in their further implementation of measures.

▪ **The Naardermeer Nature Reserve (Netherlands)** wrongly communicated on the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the old Resolution ResDip(2004)12 concerning the award of the European Diploma to the reserve until June 2009.

The Group decided to ask for 2014 annual report updated with the progress on the current CM/ResDip(2009)7 Resolution. The Group urged the authorities to respect the integrity of the open polder area surrounding Naardermeer, as specified in the condition. It further asked that a specific attention be given to the completion of the nature restoration and development around the Naardermeer core area, to the finalisation of the Naardermeer recovery plan (recommendation 3), and to the regional planning processes which should avoid further habitat fragmentation in the corridor landscapes (recommendation 4).

▪ **The Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria)** informed on the creation and the work of the Public Advisory Council for Central Balkan National Park (condition 3) and on the management of the mountain pastures in the Park (recommendation 3).

The Group's decision is reported under item 6 of the agenda.

9. Diploma holding areas in need of particular attention - discussion by the Group

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE(2014) 5

The Group debated the situation of the following areas identified as requiring special attention:

▪ The **authorities of the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve (Germany)** asked for the assistance of the Council of Europe and its representatives in finding solutions to the threats pending over the area.

The issues identified concern the Volkwardingen Wind Park project, planned only 1-2 km east of the reserve boundary and its possible negative impact on the area; the ground water extraction for irrigation due to recent agricultural developments within the reserve and its direct neighbourhood; and the funding problems faced by the area.

The annual report informs about a current discussion in Germany, over the possibility to eliminate heath land from the list of agricultural lands that benefit from EU agricultural subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The reserve's authorities expressed their strong concern that if such a decision was adopted, they would face even more serious financial problems.

The Group decided to ask that the 2014 annual report is updated with more specific information on the implementation of recommendations. After debating the possible actions to be taken and assistance to be provided, the Group instructed the Secretariat to contact the German authorities advising them to carefully assess the possible negative impact of the planned Wind Park development project and encouraging them to find a solution to the funding issue. The Group further instructed the Secretariat to write to the European Union on the funding concerns.

▪ Regarding the **Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy)**, the Group already stressed in 2013 the difficulties encountered for the adoption of the new management plan.

The issues identified concern the difficulty to adopt the management plan; the redefinition of the zones of the park where the livestock farming would be prohibited; the lack of reference to the regulations on hunting, taking into account the need to minimise disturbance to bears during the 2014 autumn hunting season; and the lack of progress with regards to the recommendations to substantially increase human and financial resources for the park.

Mr Dario Febbo, director of the national park, presented the annual report for 2013 and answered members' questions. He mentioned a letter addressed by the Ministry of the environment to the Council of Europe, informing on the advancements on the adoption of the management plan, the creation of the buffer zone and the implementation of the action plan (PATOM) for the protection of the Marsican

brown bear. Nevertheless, Mr Febbo deplored a new Italian law that enables the local interests to increase against the interests of the natural parks and mentioned the new contract for forests and pasture based on which the shepherds want to go more closely to the park population of chamois.

The Group decided to follow the adoption of the management plan, the progress on the regulations on hunting, the redefinition of the zones where the livestock farming is prohibited and the protection of the population of Chamois. The Group instructed the Secretariat to send a letter to the Italian authorities to encourage them to deploy additional efforts for a successful mediation between all relevant stakeholders in view of solving the identified issues.

- The authorities of the **Siebengebirge Nature Reserve (Germany)** have not sent the annual report for 2013, but provided information on the request of the Secretariat.

The issue identified is linked to the warning received by the Secretariat about the construction of a large retail shopping centre in the immediate proximity of reserve and of the possible negative environmental impact. There are certain problems the municipal administration recognises and debates, as if the location complies with the guidelines of sustainable area development.

On the other hand, the area's authorities reported that there is progress with the management plan of the area which should be adopted in 2014.

The Group appreciated the continuous good management of the area and decided to follow the adoption of the management plan and to keep under observation the developments on the retail shopping centre and the possible problems occurring for the reserve from its proximity. The Group instructed the Secretariat to send a letter to the German authorities advising them to carefully assess the possible negative impact of the planned construction of a Factory Outlet Centre in the proximity of the reserve.

- **Fair Isle National Scenic Area (United Kingdom)**

The main issue identified concerns the difficulty encountered, despite all the efforts deployed, to involve the main stakeholders in the establishment of a new protected marine area in conformity with the Fair Isle Marine Action Plan (FIMP), which has been called for in successive diploma renewals.

However, the Fair Isle Community and the National Trust for Scotland are very keen in retaining the European Diploma, and the Shetland Marine Spatial Planning Advisory Group had produced a draft Shetland Marine Spatial Plan that includes the proposed Fair Isle Marine Protected Area.

The Group decided to keep under observation the advancement of consultations with the stakeholders and the progress on the establishment of the Marine Protected Area. The Group further instructed the Secretariat to send a letter to the Scottish authorities to encourage them to find a solution in cooperation with the stakeholders, and to propose the exceptional visit of an expert on the site with the mandate of mediation, if needed.

- Regarding the **Białowieża National Park (Poland)**, the Group stressed the suspension in 2007 of the award due to the non-completion of the procedure for adopting the management plan.

The issue identified concerns the delay in the adoption of the management plan. According to the most recent information provided, the plan would be available for new public consultations and should be approved by the Minister of the Environment during 2014. On the other hand, progress has been made on the implementation of the second condition and of the seven recommendations.

The Group appreciated the developments done and decided to keep under observation the progress on the adoption of the new management plan. It instructed the Secretariat to send a letter to the Polish authorities to encourage them to adopt the management plan. The Group will discuss again the issue at its next meeting in 2015 and if the management plan is adopted in 2014, it will decide whether an on-the-spot visit of an expert should be organised to carry out a fresh appraisal for the renewal of the European Diploma.

▪ **De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (Netherlands)**

The issue identified concern the development in Flevoland which continues, with the expansion of Lelystad airport. A letter was sent by the authorities of the reserve to the Public Consultation Centre asking them to conduct a very careful examination and reconsideration of the proposed departure routes that would pass directly over the reserve.

The Group decided to request further information on the implementation of the condition and recommendations and to closely follow the expansion of Lelystad airport and its consequences on the reserve. The Group further instructed the Secretariat to send a letter to the Dutch authorities advising them to carefully assess the possible negative impact of the planned expansion of Lelystad airport.

▪ Regarding the **Poloniny National Park (Slovak Republic)**, the Group discussed at its meeting in 2013 the report of the expert visit in 2012 and drafted an opinion for the attention of both the Slovak authorities and the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.

The issues identified concern the long-term absence of a management plan for the park and the need to strengthen the legal capacity of the park administration to manage the area. However, there is encouraging progress on the implementation of the conditions and recommendations.

Mr Michal Adamec, representative of the Slovak authorities, thanked the Council of Europe for its support and underlined that the expert visit was a trigger to start pilot projects and to go further with the implementation of the management plan. He presented the current advancements on the implementation of the conditions and recommendations and answered members' questions. During the discussion, the difficulty to manage and monitor a small protected area was pointed out.

The Group decided to closely follow the adoption of the new management plan and the implementation of the conditions and recommendations. The Group instructed the Secretariat to send a letter to the Slovak authorities emphasising the need to implement the conditions and recommendations of the resolution on the renewal of the Diploma and appreciating the work of the management authorities of the area.

▪ No annual report has been received for the **Scandola Nature Reserve (France)**

In 2012, the Secretariat received a message from the authorities of the reserve informing about risks of negative impact and potential pollution by hydrocarbons due to a possible oil drilling exploitation in the Mediterranean Sea around the reserve of Scandola and other national parks. There are neither news on the implementation of the new management plan, nor on the extension of the marine part of the reserve, reported in 2012 as well progressing.

The Group decided to keep under observation the implementation of the new management plan and the extension of the marine part of the reserve. The Group further instructed the Secretariat to send a letter to the French authorities to propose an exceptional visit of an expert on the site to evaluate the difficulties faced by the reserve, if needed.

During the debate, the Group was several times invited to coordinate, when applicable, with IUCN, UNESCO World Heritage Centre and Ramsar for the evaluation of the protected areas.

10. On-the-spot appraisal in 2014 in view of the renewal of the European Diploma in 2015

▪ **De Weerribben Nature Reserve (Netherlands)**

The Secretariat informed the Group that there was only one renewal visit to be carried out in 2014 with a view to the possible renewal of the European Diploma in 2015 and that was to De Weerribben De Wieden Nature Reserves in Netherlands.

The Group instructed the Secretariat to organise the on-the-spot visit of an expert, in the frame of Article 9 of Resolution on the revised regulations for European Diploma for Protected Areas, and asked that particular attention be paid to the implementation of the joint management plan within the framework of the national park (subject of the condition).

11. Proposal of a new form for the submission of annual reports by the Diploma holding areas, discussion by the Group

Relevant document: T-PVS/DE(2014) 7

The Secretariat reminded the background of this item, debated first in 2013. The current model form being very lengthy and time-consuming, it creates important delays in the submission of the reports and most importantly a low reporting rate. Very often, the most important part of the form (on the conditions and recommendations of the last Resolution for the award or the renewal of the Diploma) is not filled in, which creates great difficulties for the Secretariat and the Group to correctly analyse the reports.

The changes proposed are therefore developed in view of improving the consistency of reporting across the Diploma holding areas and across years, as well as increasing the reporting ratio. The final objective of the revision of the reporting form model is an enhanced and informed decision-making by the Group of Specialists.

A first proposal for the revision of the form was made by the former Chair of the Group and was discussed by the Group of Specialists in 2013. The Group agreed to make a trial of the new shorter form for the annual reports proposed in 2013, although it agreed that it was more reasonable to use the new short form every year, except the year prior to a decision on the renewal of the European Diploma. However, the Secretariat informed that for the 2013 reporting exercise, it was impossible to use the new form, even on trial basis, as every change would have to first be agreed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The Secretariat further informed that a new on-line reporting system (ORS) is under discussion for all the Bern Convention reporting obligations by its Contracting Parties. The ORS enables a more user-friendly reporting and reduces the inconvenience on those responsible for reporting, allowing storing and sharing data. The adoption of the new reporting tool is foreseen to be implemented during 2014, therefore the timing for changing the reporting form model for the European Diploma is appropriate.

The Secretariat presented a new draft form for the annual report, which combines the proposed short pro forma model from 2013 and the currently used form. The new proposal, included in Appendix C to the document T-PVS/DE(2014)7, further takes into account the facilities provided by the new ORS.

In the light of the discussions of the Group on the annual reports submitted in the last years, the need for revising the model form appeared as largely accepted among the Group's members. Some minor changes to the new draft form were proposed by the members.

The Group instructed the Secretariat to send the new draft model form for the submission of annual reports by the Diploma holding areas to the Committee of Ministers for formal adoption. It agreed that the on-line reporting system (ORS) seems user-friendly and would decrease the area managers' inconvenience, and encouraged its use already in 2014 if the conditions for its practical implementation are met.

12. Celebration of the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma

The Secretariat informed the Group on the progress made on the preparations for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma. The celebrations will be organised on three different levels:

1. One European event gathering the Diploma holding areas' managers;
2. National events, visibility actions, publications, etc., organised directly by the Diploma holding areas;
3. One publication presenting the European Diploma, its mechanism and the Diploma holding areas.

Regarding the meeting at European level, the Secretariat proposed the date of 22 May 2015, thus aiming to combine the celebrations for the 50th anniversary to the International Biodiversity Day. The

area hosting the event is the Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli in Italy (Tuscany) and the thematic for the anniversary is still to be considered.

The Secretariat also informed that it will further invite all Diploma holding areas to organise national and/or local event(s) on the occasion of the anniversary. The Secretariat of the Bern Convention as well as members of the Group of Specialists can be present at some of these meetings. The Diploma holding areas will be invited to prepare visibility materials in their local languages, presenting the area itself and the European Diploma mechanism.

The dedicated publication will present the European Diploma system and monitoring mechanism, including a short presentation of all Diploma holding areas. The publication could also present some success stories of the Diploma in the form of case studies.

The Group debated the proposals and activities planned and the following additional ideas have been shared:

- Edit a celebration logo of the European Diploma, specially dedicated to the 50th anniversary;
- Prepare a slogan for the anniversary, to be used for all national and European events organised to mark the celebration;
- Prepare a template for a poster, which could be communicated to all Diploma holding areas, where the area itself could be presented together with the logo and slogan of the 50th anniversary;
- Contact the Diploma holding areas' managers and invite them to contribute to the preparations of the European event with ideas for the thematic topics they wish to be discussed.

The Group appreciated the work already achieved on the preparation of the celebrations for the 50th anniversary and instructed the Secretariat to continue the organisation of the celebrations in line with the proposals of the Group.

13. Date of the next meeting

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

14. Other business

None

15. Closure

The Chair thanked the members of the Group, the experts and the representatives of the areas for their contribution during the meeting. The Chair also thanked the Secretariat for the work in the preparation of the meeting and of all the needed documents.

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair.

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Appendix II – Agenda

Monday 24 March 2014

09h30-09h50 Welcome and opening

1. Opening of the meeting by the Chair of the Group Mr Peter Skoberne (Slovenia) and Mr Eladio Fernandez-Galiano, Head of the Democratic Initiatives Department

2. Adoption of the agenda

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 1]

3. General information on activities of the Bern Convention presenting an interest for the work of the Group

4. Short presentation by the Chair of the minutes of the meeting of the Group in 2013 and report on actions undertaken during the last year

[Document T-PVS/DE (2013) 10]

09h50-10h50 Applications for the award of the European Diploma: results of the appraisals

5. Applications for the award of the European Diploma: results of the on-the-spot appraisals, discussion and proposals to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

- Desertas Nature Reserve (Portugal), *Mr Joe Sultana*

[Document T-PVS/DE (2013) 4]

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 3]

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 6]

- Karadag Nature Reserve (Ukraine), *Mr Hervé Lethier*

[Document T-PVS/DE (2013) 7]

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 2]

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 6]

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 9]

10h50-11h10 Coffee break

11h10-11h40 Renewal of the European Diploma in 2013: results of the appraisals

6. Renewal of the European Diploma: results of the on-the-spot appraisal, discussion and proposals to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

- Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria), *Mr Pierre Galland*

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 4]

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 6]

11h40-12h00 New applications for the award of the European Diploma

7. Information on new application to be received in 2014

- Vashlovani Protected Areas (Georgia), *Mr Rati Japaridze*

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 8]

12h00-12h30 Annual reports 2013

8. Annual reports: presentation of the overall analysis by the Secretariat

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 5]

12h30-14h00 Lunch break

14h00-15h30 Annual reports 2013 (continued)

9. Diploma holding areas in need of particular attention - discussion by the Group

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 5]

15h30-15h40 Planned on-the-spot appraisals in 2014

10. On-the-spot appraisal in 2014 in view of the renewal of the European Diploma in 2015:

- De Weerribben Nature Reserve (Netherlands)

15h40-16h00 Draft new form for the submission of annual reports

11. Proposal of a new form for the submission of annual reports by the Diploma holding areas, discussion by the Group

[Document T-PVS/DE (2014) 7]

16h00-16h20 Coffee break

16h20-17h15 Celebration of the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma

12. Exchange of views on the format of the Ceremony and its headline

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

13. Date of the next meeting

14. Other business

15. Closure

Appendix III – Draft Resolutions for the award of the ED in 2014

Draft Resolution CM/ResDip(2014) ... on the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas to the Desertas Nature Reserve (Portugal)

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on ... 2014
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 for certain protected landscapes, reserves and natural features, as amended by Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 on the revised regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas;

Taking into consideration the expert's report presented at the meeting of the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas on 24 March 2014;

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

Solemnly awards the European Diploma for Protected Areas to the Desertas Nature Reserve (Portugal), recognising the European significance of the area which harbours a large number of endemic, threatened, and/or vulnerable species of flora and fauna and has unique and remarkable landscapes;

Places the aforesaid area under the patronage of the Council of Europe until 2019;

Attaches the following two conditions to the award:

1. that the Portuguese Government continues to take the necessary steps to preserve the current islands status of the Desertas Islands and to unequivocally support the Regional Government of Madeira in all matters concerning the nature reserve;
2. that the responsible regional authority updates the management plan of the Desertas Nature Reserve by the end of 2016,
 - a. taking into consideration the enlargement of the strictly protected area;
 - b. improving conservation efforts in terms of personnel, logistics and budget necessary for the proper management of the Desertas Nature Reserve;

Attaches the following seven recommendations to the award:

1. take all necessary precautions to ensure that no species of plants and animals are introduced to the reserve;
2. improve the existing monitoring system for the fauna and flora populations of the Desertas;
3. analyse and publish studies carried out on the flora and fauna on Bugio, following the total eradication of alien species;
4. increase the efforts to combat soil erosion on the plateau surface of Bugio;
5. eradicate the goat population from Deserta Grande or at least to keep the population very low and subject to a strict monitoring scheme;

6. promote the training of nature guides to accompany tourists in this area;
7. investigate if the increasing colony of yellow-legged gull (*Larus michahellis atlantis*) on Ilhéu Chão is having a negative impact on the breeding seabird populations on Deserta Grande and Bugio.

**Draft Resolution CM/ResDip(2014) ...
on the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas
to the Karadag Nature Reserve (Ukraine)**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on ... 2014
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 for certain protected landscapes, reserves and natural features, as amended by Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 on the revised regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas;

Taking into consideration the expert's report presented at the meeting of the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas on 24 March 2014;

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

Solemnly awards the European Diploma for Protected Areas to the Karadag Nature Reserve (Ukraine), recognising the European significance of the area which has remarkable landscapes, exceptional geological features and a very rich variety of flora and fauna of particular importance for European biodiversity;

Places the aforesaid area under the patronage of the Council of Europe until 2019;

Attaches the following two conditions to the award:

1. adopt a 5 to 10-year management plan for the nominated area by the end of 2015. This plan should meet the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) standards and address, among other matters (1) the climate change, (2) the monitoring and management of alien and/or invasive species, (3) the possible enlargement of the protected area and (4) the future establishment of a buffer zone. It should cover both the terrestrial and marine parts of the area and detail sufficient human, technical and financial means for its full implementation;
2. start a formal discussion and negotiation process with the local municipalities and other relevant private socio-economic actors for the establishment of a buffer zone around the nominated area. This process should aim to (1) define the clear borders of this buffer zone and (2) determine long-term land-use objectives for the development of socio-economic activities in this zone, fully compatible with the European importance of the nominated area and the maintenance of the biological and physical integrity of its landscape. This process should be completed before the appraisal visit for the renewal of the European Diploma to the area;

Attaches the following six recommendations to the award:

1. complete the enlargement of the nominated site with the adjacent properties, where land use agreements have already been signed with private owners;
2. strengthen the prevention and minimisation of illegal activities within the nominated site, especially regarding mass tourism¹ and illegal fishing in the marine part, in line with the efforts already implemented;
3. secure the future of the scientific library given to the reserve by T.I. Vyazemsky and raise additional external funds to complete the ongoing process of digitising the 57 000 books;
4. facilitate the elaboration of a sustainable socio-economic vision and strategy at the regional level, that would promote the preservation of the nominated area and guarantee the biological and physical integrity of the landscape in the long term;
5. continue the inventory and mapping of species and types of habitats and complete the process of designating Karadag Nature Reserve as an area of special conservation interest within the Emerald Network;
6. provide the reserve's administration with appropriate funding that meets the standards of management required for an area holding the European Diploma.

¹ Access to tourists is normally prohibited in the marine part of the reserve; visits for scientific purposes are allowed but are subject to a special authorisation issued to a limited number of people per day. Therefore, all leisure activities are illegal in these strictly protected areas.

Appendix IV – Opinion in view of the renewal of the ED**Opinion****of the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma following the on-the-spot appraisal in view of the renewal of the European Diploma of the Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria)**

After examining the report drawn up by the independent expert following the on-the-spot appraisal of the area, the Group of Specialists:

1. takes note of the conclusions of the report by the independent expert and the caution expressed concerning the lack of formally adopted new management plan for the area;
2. notes the good work achieved by the National Park's staff during the past five years during which the area was awarded the European Diploma;
3. recognises that all Diploma-holding areas should demonstrate exemplary management practices;
4. advises that the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Central Balkan National Park is suspended, until the following condition has been satisfied:
 - a new management plan for the area is formally adopted, with no alteration of the conservation regime in the different zones of the park and with similar conservation conditions, and in particular (1) avoid allowing an increase of the overall capacity for summer grazing, (2) continue to forbid commercial timber in the Park;
5. decides that, once the condition above has been met, to re-examine the possible renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Central Balkan National Park.