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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas

24 February 2021
(virtual meeting)

DRAFT COMMUNICATION PLAN

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Background

Since 1965 the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers has awarded the European Diploma for Protected Areas to landscapes of exceptional European importance for the preservation of biological and geological diversity which are managed in an exemplary way.

It is a prestigious award and a great boost to the reputation of the regions and countries where it has been granted.

A recent survey amongst European Diploma stakeholders indicated a wish to give more visibility to the Diploma. New material was produced for [the website](#) and plans were put in place for communication initiatives such as a travelling exhibition. These were put on hold because of COVID 19. Partnerships with other bodies are advanced: a memorandum of understanding with UNESCO is in the pipeline.

The time is ripe to communicate the diploma, and more widely on issues of biodiversity and environmental protection. As governments and activists, the world over talk about the need for a green recovery, the Council of Europe and specifically the Bern Convention can rightly claim a place as leaders of change.

The Council of Europe is giving environmental issues a platform, through the recent [human rights and the planet conference](#), with an new emphasis on [human rights and the environment](#) and through the World Forum for [Democracy](#), which will roll from November 2020 to November 2021 concentrating on environmental issues.

Messages

There are a number of key messages, which can be refined according to circumstances. Some possibilities:

- The Diploma is a tool in the green recovery. Not only does it award excellence, it gives us a means to check that standards are maintained.
- COVID 19 has proven that when we destroy habitats nature hits back. The Diploma is a way to expand the respect of nature and protect ourselves in the future.
- By awarding excellence in nature protection, we are ensuring a cleaner, greener future.

Partners in different countries and regions can be encouraged to create their own tailored messages, as long as they refer back to the Council of Europe and the Bern Convention.

Audiences

In promoting the Diploma, we will target a general public audience and a more specialised audience.

Action through social media will be broad in scope, yet adaptable to different countries and regions through the intermediary of their own authorities or activists. Specialised audiences can be targeted through LinkedIn or through conferences, public forums and events.

How to give the Diploma more prominence

A few simple steps will help to raise the profile of the Diploma. This in turn will raise the profile of the Bern Convention and the important role it plays in halting climate change.

Firstly, we can leverage social media in the following ways:

1. Use existing material timed to coincide with relevant events and teamed with messages specific to the audience.

Some attractive material already exists, including an explainer video and a map showing the different Diploma sites, along with posters and photographs of a more general nature that could be used again and again.

Such material works well on Facebook and Twitter; Instagram is an excellent option for photos and other graphics.

To use this to best effect, we need to earmark possible calendar dates for a social media campaign. This could be international days, such as World Wildlife Day (March 3), World Water Day (March 22), the International Day of Biological Diversity (May 22); a story that coincides with topical news, such as wildfires or scientific reports; an anniversary such as the first ever diploma granted, or something pertaining to a particular region or country.

2. Create new material tailored to relevant platforms.

If resources are available, both in terms of budget, time and personnel, then new material can be produced.

An easy investment is a [LUMEN5](#) type video which can be quickly created with online software.

Other options include [infographics](#), which work especially well with statistics, but which take more time and money to produce.

Written articles, and material for those within the network, works well on LinkedIn, which allows closed networks of professionals to share information.

The material already prepared for the travelling exhibition can be adapted to a virtual online exhibition which could be housed on different websites and marketed via a campaign on social media.

Secondly, we can make wider use of existing networks and extend partnerships. Links already exist with UNESCO and with the [Protected Planets](#) programme, among others. We can supplement this in the following ways:

- Asking them to host material on their own websites, with a link to the Bern Convention site. This will increase the possibility that viewers of their site will discover the Diploma, and will increase traffic to Diploma site thanks to the fact that the algorithms used in searches will deem it more important and push it up the search results (although this is dependant on how the search engine reacts to the individual user .
- Make material such as the virtual exhibition available to partners, asking them to translate and make use of it in their own communications efforts, with the understanding they highlight the Council of Europe and the Bern Convention.
- Ensure that the Bern Convention and the Diploma feature prominently in communication work for the World Forum for Democracy during the year. Contacts should be made between colleagues to this effect.

More detailed communication work can take place if time and resources allow: for example, changes to the website to make it more attractive; short films showcasing the main projects, or interesting specialised documentary makers in stories about the projects, and when COVID 19 is over, creating a promotional package for conferences and events.

Constraints and risks

We should not underestimate the amount of time and effort that this work will entail. Guidance from the Council of Europe Directorate of Communication will be essential to ensure that the best is made of the available resources, especially when it comes to promoting the Diploma and other Bern Convention material on the CoE main portals and platforms, where there is already a pre-existing audience. We also need to recognise that, with a small secretariat, the Bern Convention does not have the time to manage social media accounts, and that choices will need to be made.

Proposals for action

- Carry out an inventory of existing material. This should include all material generated internally, but also anything that has been produced by the wider network.
- Create a forward plan of dates that can be used for social media action.
- Draw up a plan of existing partners and potential partners. Make contact to see what synergies can be exploited, from information sharing, to carrying material on their own social media.
- Make internal contacts with the World Forum for Democracy to ensure that the Diploma, and on the Bern Convention in general, is reflected both at their online events (perhaps by having a guest from an Award site) and in their communication.