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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

42<sup>nd</sup> meeting  
Strasbourg, 28 November - 2 December 2022

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

23-24 February 2022  
*(online meeting)*

**-MEETING REPORT-**

*Document prepared by  
the Secretariat of the Bern Convention*

The Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas met online on 23 and 24 February 2022. The Standing Committee/Bureau is invited to:

- Take note of the meeting report of the Group of Specialists;
- Consider forwarding the draft Resolutions renewing the Diploma to 7 areas (see document [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)09](#)) to the Committee of Ministers for formal adoption;
- Express concern regarding the absence of annual report received from the authorities of the Scandola Nature Reserve (France);
- Take note of the worrying situation in the Doñana National Park (Spain) and call on Spanish authorities to fully comply with the conditions and recommendation attached to the last renewal of the European Diploma;
- Take note of the state of play of on-the-spot appraisal visits (see document [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)01](#)) and of the visits to be carried out in priority in 2022;
- Welcome the virtual exhibition and the derived web page.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Opening of the meeting.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Adoption of the agenda.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. General information on activities presenting an interest for the work of the Group of Specialists. 4</b>	
3.a Short presentation of the report of the meeting of the group in 2021 and of the activities undertaken during the last year.....	4
3.b Follow up by the Secretariat on the conclusions of the 2021 meeting of the Group of Specialists.....	4
<b>4. Consequences and lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5. Results of the advisory visits, discussion and proposals to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe .....</b>	<b>5</b>
5.a Bayerischer Wald National Park (Germany) .....	5
5.b Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve (Germany) .....	6
5.c Vanoise National Park (France).....	7
5.d Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy).....	7
5.e Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site (Austria).....	7
5.f Carpathian Biosphere Reserve (Ukraine) .....	8
5.g Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve (Portugal) .....	8
5.h Swiss National Park (Switzerland) .....	8
<b>6. Presentation of the reporting results by the Secretariat and the Group of Specialists .....</b>	<b>9</b>
6.a Analysis of the annual reports .....	9
6.b Follow up on the areas identified in 2021 as requiring particular attention: .....	10
<b>7. On-the-spot appraisal visits in 2022 .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>8. Follow up on the communication strategy for the European Diploma .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>9. Creation of a pool of independent experts – results of the call for manifestation of interest .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>10. Any other business .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>11. Date and place of the next meeting.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>12. Conclusions of the meeting.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Annexe 1 - Agenda.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Annexe 2 - List of participants .....</b>	<b>23</b>

## **1. OPENING OF THE MEETING**

The meeting was opened on Wednesday 23 February 2022 by the Chair of the Group of Specialists, Mr Jan Plesnik (Czech Republic), via video-conference. He welcomed the participants and introduced the new members appointed by Germany and Slovenia. He thanked all contributors to the European Diploma: the members of the Group, experts, Secretariat, site managers and other stakeholders.

## **2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

The Group adopted with two amendments proposed by the Secretariat the draft agenda (see Appendix 1)

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

### **3.a Short presentation of the report of the meeting of the group in 2021 and of the activities undertaken during the last year**

The Chair briefly wrapped up the outcomes and conclusions of the 2021 meeting of the Group of Specialists, elaborated further in the next point.

### **3.b Follow up by the Secretariat on the conclusions of the 2021 meeting of the Group of Specialists**

The Secretariat recalled that in 2021 the Group of Specialists decided to test a virtual scenario for the on-the-spot appraisal visits consisting of online meetings with stakeholders and, if possible, a visit to the area pending the sanitary situation allows.

The Secretariat informed that one visit to the Swiss National Park had been carried out according to the 2 phases of the virtual scenario, three other on-the-spot appraisal visits had been implemented according to the first phase of the scenario only, four traditional physical visits had taken place.

The Secretariat further informed that a combined on-the-spot appraisal visit to two diploma holding areas in Sweden could not take place as the virtual scenario was not adapted and once the sanitary situation improved, the window for travelling to Sweden was too small.

The Secretariat also informed the Group of Specialists of the decision of the Port Cros National Park (France) was not applying for the renewal of the European Diploma considering its heavy reporting obligations and the divergence of its requirements from the objectives of the National Park.

The Secretariat confirmed that the resolutions renewing the Diploma of the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve & Weerribben-Wieden National Park and the resolution extending the validity of the Diploma to 11 areas had been adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 July 2021.

The members of the Group of Specialists took note of the information provided and regretted the decision of the authorities of Port Cros National Park. They believed that the European Diploma was not competing with other international certifications but that more synergies should be found in order to reduce the reporting and monitoring fatigue.

## **4. CONSEQUENCES AND LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The Secretariat recalled that virtual scenario for the on-the-spot appraisal visits had been put into practice and tested within 4 advisory visits.

The scenario had been perceived diversely by the managers of the Diploma holding areas. In some cases, the virtual visit went extremely well, the meetings with a great variety of stakeholders were well prepared and the discussions were very fruitful. In other cases, the virtual format of the on-the-spot appraisal visit faced some

resistance from managers, the diversity of stakeholders in the online meetings was less representative and the discussions were sometimes not so informative.

The lessons learnt from the 2021 experience are the following:

- The success of the virtual visits depends a lot on the commitment of the manager of the area, and his/her readiness to set up meetings with relevant stakeholders, the size of the area, the language skills of the participants etc.
- Preparatory meetings with managing teams to explain the methodology, purpose and objectives of the online meetings are very useful.
- An online meeting with the managing team ahead of any field visit could be considered a standard element of on-the-spot appraisal visits.
- The online format remains very flexible. Meetings do not need to take place the same day and can be scheduled at suitable times for stakeholders.
- The checklist for independent experts is a useful guidance for structuring the discussions.
- The virtual scenario is not adapted to combined on-the-spot appraisal visits.

Independent experts shared their own experience and views on the virtual scenario. They believed that the virtual scenario could not replace on-the-spot appraisal visits but represented a complementary monitoring tool. It was in particular considered relevant if the independent experts had a previous knowledge of the area, and also useful to raise the profile of the European Diploma and maintain the contact with the area managers.

The Group recognised that the virtual scenario was not appropriate for areas at risk. Should travel restrictions persist, it would be necessary to assess the areas which are at risk and prioritise them as physical visits.

Finally, the Group largely acknowledged that the combination of online meetings with managing authorities together with a field visit was very relevant.

The members of the Group of Specialists acknowledged that the virtual scenario for on-the spot appraisal visits could not replace physical on-the-spot appraisal visits but was a “good enough” alternative. The Group also supported that online meetings with area managers in preparation of any assessment visit should become a standard element of the on-the-spot appraisals.

## **5. RESULTS OF THE ADVISORY VISITS, DISCUSSION AND PROPOSALS TO THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

### **5.a Bayerischer Wald National Park (Germany)**

The independent expert, Mr Robert Brunner, presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Bayerischer Wald National Park to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)02](#)). Based on his findings he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Bayerischer Wald National Park for an additional period of 10 years and to extend the European Diploma to the entire National Park as per the request of the managing authorities.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the expert's proposal and following their discussion endorsed a draft resolution attaching four conditions and nine recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Bayerischer Wald National Park as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)09](#).

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with the follow up on the endorsement of the draft resolution by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention and its possible official adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2022.

### **5.b Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve (Germany)**

The independent expert, Mr Robert Brunner, presented the outcomes of his extraordinary on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)03](#)). Based on his findings he suggested that in addition to the conditions and recommendations as laid out in Resolution [CM/ResDip\(2018\)2](#) renewing the Diploma in 2018, and which remain in force, the following 6 conditions and 3 recommendations should be added:

#### ***Conditions:***

1. Forbid access including for fishing to the right (southern) riverbank of the Danube and to the gravel banks between Weltenburg monastery and river kilometer 2416 (see also condition 1 of the 2018 renewal). The same prohibition should also apply to the left side of the Danube wherever ecologically worthwhile.
2. Set a mandatory minimum depth of the waterway in relation to the water level gauge at Kelheim as well as a mandatory maximum speed for navigation on the Danube in the Weltenburger Enge, which might differ between upstream and downstream rides. These limitations should be based on a study on the impact of cruises in the Weltenburger Enge, conducted to assert the consequences on ichthyofauna and macrozoobenthos. The results of this study shall determine the limitations for cruises with regard to water level and speed and help avoid demand-oriented arbitrary adjustments. The minimum depth and maximum speed should take into consideration the interests of nature protection, fishery and ship owners.
3. Increase the number of skilled and competent wardens or rangers in order to manage the rising number of visitors and the violations of set rules. This should include other authorities such as the police. Allocate wardens and rangers with the necessary means and capacity to enforce the regulations and guarantee a balanced coexistence between touristic and leisure activities and nature protection. Their competences should be reviewed and strengthened when appropriate.
4. Reduce, at least in the core area the existing road network to those roads and paths, which are officially designated and marked as hiking, biking and mountain-biking routes for visitors. Any unmarked route in the core zone shall be dismantled through natural barriers of falling trees, cracking of the surface or other measures. It would be helpful to extend these limitations and measures to the whole nature reserve. The same arrangements shall apply for outlooks, which shall be reduced and set up in secured spots.
5. Concerning the Celtic Wall, alternative routes shall be designated to stop the ongoing destruction of the archaeological monument.
6. Share the final version of the regulation with the Council of Europe as soon as it has been accepted by the government.

#### ***Recommendations:***

1. The maximum number of barges, the number of admissible journeys, the speed of the barges (which was recently raised from 5 to 15 resp. 20 km/h), and the temporal limitations shall be fixed mandatorily in accordance with relevant organisations, first of all with the fishery. The provisions must consider the

protection requirements of the landscape and its fauna and flora between Kelheim and Weltenburg. The currently permissible values do not seem to be appropriate.

2. Prohibitions as laid out in the draft regulation shall be specified in their spatial effect. This applies to the Danube as well as to the terrestrial part. For the Danube, the zone which can be used for navigation of tourist ships, barges and all kinds of private boats like kayaks, rubber boats etc. should be exactly defined. The zone should be illustrated on maps and could be determined in accordance to the main current line or to the central line of the waterway.
3. Ensure that the number of visitors does not exceed the carrying capacity of the protected area and that all regulations and limitations are fully observed by users and visitors. This can be achieved by alternative offers for tourists or limitations e.g. for private boats on the Danube in the Weltenburger Enge.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the expert's proposal and following their discussion invited the relevant authorities of the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve to implement without delay the above listed conditions and recommendations in addition to those attached to the 2018 renewal Resolution and to report back to the Group of Specialists at its 2023 annual meeting.

### 5.c Vanoise National Park (France)

The independent expert, Mr Pierre Galland, presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Vanoise National Park to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)06](#)). Based on his findings he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Vanoise National Park for an additional period of 10 years.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the expert's proposal and following their discussion endorsed a draft resolution attaching ten recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Vanoise National Park as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)09](#).

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with the follow up on the endorsement of the draft resolution by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention and its possible official adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2022.

### 5.d Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy)

The independent expert, Mr Pierre Galland, presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Gran Paradiso National Park to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)07](#)). Based on his findings he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Gran Paradiso National Park for an additional period of 10 years.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the expert's proposal and following their discussion endorsed a draft resolution attaching ten recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Gran Paradiso National Park as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)09](#).

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with the follow up on the endorsement of the draft resolution by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention and its possible official adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2022.

### 5.e Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site (Austria)

The independent expert, Mr Maurice Hoffmann, presented the outcomes of his virtual on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)08](#)).

Based on his findings he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site for an additional period of 5 years.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the expert's proposal and following their discussion endorsed a draft resolution attaching eight recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)09](#).

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with the follow up on the endorsement of the draft resolution by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention and its possible official adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2022.

#### **5.f Carpathian Biosphere Reserve (Ukraine)**

The independent expert, Mr Bev Nichols, presented the outcomes of his virtual on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)11](#)). Based on his findings he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve for an additional period of 5 years.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the expert's proposal and following their discussion endorsed a draft resolution attaching twelve recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)09](#).

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with the follow up on the endorsement of the draft resolution by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention and its possible official adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2022.

#### **5.g Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve (Portugal)**

The independent expert, Ms Blanca Ramos, presented the outcomes of her virtual on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2021\)08](#)). Based on her findings she suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve for an additional period of 5 years.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the expert's proposal and following their discussion endorsed a draft resolution attaching one condition and ten recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)09](#).

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with the follow up on the endorsement of the draft resolution by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention and its possible official adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2022.

#### **5.h Swiss National Park (Switzerland)**

The independent expert, Mr Peter Skoberne, presented the outcomes of his hybrid on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Swiss National Park to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)05](#)). Based on his findings he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Swiss National Park for an additional period of 10 years.



The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the expert's proposal and following their discussion endorsed a draft resolution attaching seven recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Swiss National Park as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)09](#).

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with the follow up on the endorsement of the draft resolution by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention and its possible official adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2022.

## **6. PRESENTATION OF THE REPORTING RESULTS BY THE SECRETARIAT AND THE GROUP OF SPECIALISTS**

### **6.a Analysis of the annual reports**

The Secretariat recalled the objectives of the annual report and the Group's mandate, which are defined by the Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 on the revised regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas. It also recalled that conditions and recommendations of each area are integrated in the nominative reporting templates which are shared with area managers individually. This approach helps site manager to address key information and meet the reporting expectations and therefore will continue to be used in the future.

In 2021, the number of annual reports received slightly decreased from 70 in 2020 to 68 (out of the 73 areas currently awarded with the European Diploma). The Secretariat recalled the scoring system used for the European Diploma dashboard, which has been updated following the reception of the 2021 reports. The scoring system currently only acknowledges the extent to which areas are meeting reporting obligations. The Secretariat informed the Group of Specialists that its suggestion to extend the reference period had been taken into consideration. The scores were now calculated over 7 years. The Secretariat reported that the number of areas with red scores and the number of areas with orange scores remained both stable compared to last year.

As per the suggestion of the Group of Specialists to look into the quality of the reporting, the assessment forms had been slightly amended by introducing scores measuring the extent to which areas comply with the recommendations or conditions. The scores should also help measure progress over the years.

As in previous years, members of the Group of Specialists had been involved in the assessment of the annual reports by using the assessment forms. The document [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)10](#) provided the conclusions of the Group for each Diploma holding area. The Group discussed key overall findings of their assessments and highlighted challenges and gaps in European Diploma reporting. Overall, the Group found annual reporting of a good quality and the new scoring system added to the assessment forms useful.

Members of the Group welcomed the revised assessment form including the scoring of the compliance with the recommendations and conditions but regretted that no example and explanation on how to use the scoring system had been made available. The Group also acknowledged that this year's assessment of the annual reports would set a useful baseline for the future.

The Group of Specialists welcomed the results of the 2021 annual reporting, highlighting the positive submission trend and thanked the managers of the Diploma holding areas for complying with the reporting obligation, as well as the members of the Group of Specialists and the Secretariat for their contribution to the analysis of the reports.

The Group of Specialists instructed the Secretariat to elaborate criteria for the use of the new scoring system added to the assessment forms.

## **6.b Follow up on the areas identified in 2021 as requiring particular attention:**

- **Scandola Nature Reserve (France)**

The Secretariat recalled that in 2020 the Group of Specialists recommended unanimously not to renew the Diploma to the Scandola Nature Reserve, due to the considerable lack of progress and minimal attempts of communication with the Secretariat and thus with the Group, despite several warnings by the Group over the past years. However, it mandated the Secretariat to continue monitoring the area, where possible in liaison with other organizations such as UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, and to report annually at the Group of Specialists meeting.

A huge public debate had resulted from the decision and under the pressure of the public, the authorities took initial steps to improve the protection of the nature reserve.

Last year the Group of Specialists took note of some progress on the ground of the information provided in the annual report but acknowledged that concrete actions were needed.

While this year no annual report had been submitted, the Secretariat continued to receive regular updates throughout the year. Despite the regional decree, leisure boats continued to overnight in the Nature Reserve. Despite panels and signs, boats continued entering "quiet zones" around osprey nests and people continued disembarking on the beaches of the Nature Reserve. Furthermore, boats did not respect the speed limit and there were no wardens to enforce the rules. Despite the good intentions showed in the annual report last year, managing authorities had not taken any action to regulate the over frequentation of leisure boats.

The Secretariat did not receive any update regarding the extension of the Nature Reserve. Last year the plans for the extension of the reserve were adopted by the Regional Parliament of Corsica and there were signals that it could result in the creation of a second protected area with a different protection status.

The Group of Specialists regretted that managing authorities did not submit an annual report. It expressed its concerns regarding the information provided by the Secretariat and encouraged the authorities to enforce the measures which were announced in the 2020 annual report.

The Group of Specialists called on the relevant authorities to report in 2022 on the actions undertaken to fulfil the conditions and recommendations contained in Resolution [CM/ResDip\(2010\)11](#) and reiterated in the expert report [T-PVS/DE\(2019\)2](#), in particular to ensure the protection of the area by extending the Nature Reserve and creating a marine park.

- **Doñana National Park (Spain)**

The Secretariat recalled that last year the Group of Specialists decided to postpone the renewal of the Diploma of the Doñana National Park and to seek information from European Commission on the status of the legal proceedings and from UNESCO's World Heritage Centre on the findings of their reactive mission.

Both the [Judgment of the European Court of Justice](#) of 24 June 2021 and the [Report of the Joint WHC / IUCN / RAMSAR reactive monitoring mission](#) to Doñana National Park, Spain (25-28 February 2020) became in the meantime available.

According to the ECJ judgement Spanish authorities have failed to adopt appropriate measures to prevent the deterioration of the natural habitats and the habitats of species located within the protected areas of the Doñana region. It states that overexploitation of the Almonte-Marismas aquifer has led to desiccation of the peridunal lagoons of Doñana National Park and, as a result, to the deterioration of the protected natural areas which depend on that aquifer, including several natural habitats and habitats of species protected by the Habitats Directive.

The findings of the joint reactive monitoring mission resulted in 15 recommendations inviting the Spanish authorities to inter alia:

- To ensure the accelerated and urgent closure of all illegal water wells, to implement the Special Management Plan of the Irrigation Zones and to ensure the recovery of the aquifers to good status by no later than 2027, to ensure that any new development projects are properly assessed, and to encourage sustainable agriculture practices;
- To define the water requirements of the property to maintain its outstanding universal value;
- To anticipate the impact of climate change on the water consumption
- To create a buffer zone that includes the Ramsar and Natura 2000 sites;
- To strengthen the cooperation with all stakeholders and ensure the availability of scientific data;
- To monitor the water pollutants;
- To envisage the designation of a marine protected area adjacent to the World Heritage Property;
- To expand educational activities;
- To reinforce cooperation with other delta river protected areas.

There were no indications in the 2021 annual report that the authorities will swiftly be willing to take action in order to address the conclusions of the ECJ judgement and the recommendations of the joint WHC / IUCN / RAMSAR reactive monitoring mission.

In addition, according to the local and national Spanish press, the regional government of Andalucía was planning to legalise most if not all of the illegal wells.

The Group of Specialists took note of the ECJ judgement and of the report of the joint reactive monitoring mission and expressed its concerns regarding the information published in the Spanish press.

The Group of Specialists called on the relevant authorities to comply with condition No. 2 attached to the renewal of the European Diploma (Resolution [CM/ResDip\(2010\)13](#)) and to report to the Group on how they intend to address the ECJ judgement and the recommendations of the World Heritage Centre, IUCN and Ramsar Convention.

- **Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve (Germany)**

The Secretariat recalled that the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve was under scrutiny because the regional authorities were planning to build the Volkwardingen Wind Park which would spoil the unique landscape and biodiversity of Lüneburger Heide, block an important migration corridor for the black grouse and black stork and destroy an important habitat for bats and birds.

In 2020, the Group of Specialists had mandated an extraordinary on-the-spot appraisal to re-establish the dialogue and reassure the managing authorities of the support of the Group of Specialists.

Although the extraordinary visit was planned in 2021, it had not been possible to carry it out because the Secretariat believed it was necessary to have a physical visit.

According to the 2021 annual report, the authorities were calling on an on-the-spot appraisal visit. While there was no reference to the Wind Park project, the authorities pointed to the construction of a motorway stop in the vicinity of the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve which would result in light pollution and have negative impacts on bats. Authorities also reported on wolf attacks against the sheep flocks owned by the reserve. Finally, the authorities expressed concern regarding ecological problems concerning the black grouse.

The Group of Specialists mandated the Secretariat to organise in priority an on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve in 2022.

- **Abruzzo Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy)**

The Secretariat recalled that the main issue continued to be the official adoption of a new management plan, due by 2013 and the management of the Marsican brown bear.

Last year the authorities reported that the three regions concerned by the Park's plan had drafted an agreement for the definition of the procedure for approving the plan and its timetable. The agreement allowed for a single procedure for all three regions, and the managing authorities were in the process of sending the preliminary report to the three regions, opening the strategic environmental assessment process.

In 2021, the preliminary report and the preliminary plan document were opened to public consultation and subject to comments for 30 days. This phase, called scoping, ended in November. The authorities informed that the completion of these steps would allow to get to the heart of the final approval procedure of the management plan, which could thus be definitively completed next year.

Regarding the Marsican brown bear, genetic monitoring continued in 2021. 128 samples were collected and will have to be analysed. The analysis has so far revealed the presence of 10 individuals (3 females; 7 males). A particularly relevant figure was that 6 of these individuals, including 2 females, certainly frequented areas outside the core area. The expansion and colonisation of new home ranges/territories by females was one of the key factors identified for the conservation of the subspecies.

The Group of Specialists took note that an on-the-spot appraisal visits was planned in 2022. The Group instructed the Secretariat to include in the mandate of the independent expert entrusted with the visit to look carefully at the adoption process of the management plan and to reflect on this in his/her conclusions if there had still been no progress. Based on the findings of the on-the-spot appraisal visit and the continuing lack of progress, the European Diploma could not be renewed.

- **Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve (Germany)**

The Secretariat recalled that the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve benefited from an extra-ordinary on-the-spot appraisal visit and that the Group of Specialists already heard about the findings and the conclusions of the expert under item 5b.

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

The Secretariat recalled that last year a solar panel farm was planned in the Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve.

While the project was meeting requirements of the Federal Government as well as the objectives of the Ministry for the Environment of Baden-Württemberg, the municipality of Bad Wurzach informed that the European Diploma was of absolute high priority and that the solar plant should neither question the award nor the future renewal of the European Diploma.

The Group of Specialists encouraged the local municipality to conduct an environmental impact assessment in line with national and EU regulations.

In 2021, neither the managing authorities of the Nature Reserve nor the municipal authorities reported on the state of play of the solar panel plant. The annual report did not specifically refer to the solar plant but under recommendation 6, the authorities reported that the impact of all building developments in the area on the visual integrity of the Wurzacher Basin was examined and taken into consideration in all decisions.

The Group of Specialists acknowledged that the situation was under control and that the area was not requiring special attention anymore.

- **Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park (Belarus)**

The Secretariat informed that several complaints had been filed to the Bern Convention within the frame of the case file system regarding the construction of a fence at the border between Poland and Belarus on the territory of the transboundary UNESCO World Heritage Site Białowieża Forest and the adjacent Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park which was awarded the European Diploma.

The fence would create a barrier with negative impact on the protected species, creating an obstacle to the movement of animal populations but also provoking injuries.

No reference to this fence was made by the managing authorities in the 2021 annual report of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park.

The Group of Specialists took note of the information provided and acknowledged that the threat represented by the fence went far beyond the boundaries of the National Park. The Group of Specialists asked the Bureau of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention to assess the possible negative impact of the fence along the entire border.

- **Thayatal National Park (Austria)**

The area of the national park was mainly deciduous forest. The core zone represented more than 90 % of the park. Forestry changed the forest pattern. Over decades, spruce tree became commercially important. But because of the morphology of the Thaya valley with its steep slopes, spruce trees never covered more than around 25 %.

The national park management plan was aiming from the beginning to achieve a forest composition with native trees within a fix period of 15 years allowing management interventions in the core zone forest.

The regulations of the National Park Thayatal were updated in 2017 extending the time frame for interventions to 31 years.

According to IUCN criteria, National Parks should be free from management interventions.

The Group of Specialists took note of the information provided and mandated the Secretariat to address the managing authorities and request an explanation for the extension of the intervention period and how the extension will be reflected into the management plan.

## 7. ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL VISITS IN 2022

The Secretariat referred to document [T-PVS/DE\(2022\)01](#) which presented the state of play of the on-the-spot appraisal visits.

The Secretariat recalled that the validity of the Diploma of 11 areas had been extended to 2024. While there was no time pressure to undertake on-the-spot appraisal visits, it was important to include a few of these areas in the 2022 workplan to reduce the backlog and resume the usual intervals of the advisory visits.

The Secretariat highlighted that in 2022, there was only one ordinary on-the-spot appraisal visit to Retezat National Park planned as the renewal of the Diploma was scheduled in 2023. The visit could be combined with Piatra Craiului National Park. The Secretariat informed that a complaint under the case file system was filed to the Convention regarding Retezat National Park pointing to intensive logging. The Secretariat suggested to define the mandate of the independent expert entrusted with the visit so as to encompass the allegations of the complaint.

The Secretariat further emphasised the visits to be carried out in priority in the document TPVS/DE(2022)01. Among them there were the postponed combined visit to Muddus, Sarek and Padjelanta National Parks in Sweden, the combined visit to Maremma Regional Park and Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park as the latter was under closer monitoring for several years now, and the visit to the Luneburg Heath Nature Reserve which was anticipated to last year but could not take place because of the persisting COVID-19.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the suggestions of the Secretariat to carry out in priority the combined visits to the Muddus, Sarek and Padjelanta National Parks in Sweden, the combined visit to the Maremma Regional Park and Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy), the combined visit to Piatra Craiului and Retezat National Parks (Romania) and the visit to the Luneburg Heath Nature Reserve (Germany) and to select a couple of areas whose Diploma was extended until 2024.

## 8. FOLLOW UP ON THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

The Secretariat informed the Group of Specialists that as part of the communication strategy for raising the profile of the European Diploma, the exhibition prepared for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bern Convention had been transformed into a [virtual exhibition](#). It was available in French and English and had also been translated into all the national languages of the countries hosting Diploma holding areas. The objective was that all Diploma holding areas display the exhibition in their information centres or on their websites.

The Secretariat further informed the Group of Specialists that the Directorate of Communication of the Council of Europe had assisted in the creation of a specific [webpage](#) derived from the exhibition and will also provide the possibility to download the virtual exhibition.

The Secretariat also reported that the European Diploma had been in the spotlight during the 2021 World Forum for Democracy which focused on the theme “Can Democracy save the environment?”. The manager of the Burren Region in Ireland took part in a Forum Lab entitled “Better together: Engaging communities for nature conservation and protection” and showcased the Burren Programme about community engagement. The Burren Programme had finished in second place of the Democracy Innovation Award.

Finally, the European Diploma was also promoted through the 2021 communication campaign of the Bern Convention entitled "[Voices of nature](#)".

The members of the Group of Specialists welcomed the new communication outputs and the efforts for raising the profile of the European Diploma.

The Group suggested to make a presentation on the European Diploma at the annual meeting of the EUROPARC Federation.

#### **9. CREATION OF A POOL OF INDEPENDENT EXPERTS – RESULTS OF THE CALL FOR MANIFESTATION OF INTEREST**

The Secretariat reported that following a call for manifestation of interest, a pool of 12 independent experts providing pro bono intellectual services had been constituted and will be involved in on-the-spot appraisal visits for the next 4 years. The pool consisted in both experts who had already an experience with the European Diploma and new experts.

The members of the Group of Specialists took note of the information provided.

#### **10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was raised.

#### **11. DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The Secretariat, in liaison with the Chair, will notify members of the date of the next meeting in 2023.

#### **12. CONCLUSIONS OF THE MEETING**

The Chair thanked the members of the Group of Specialists, the independent experts, the management authorities of the European Diploma holding areas and the Secretariat for their huge efforts throughout the year and lively discussions and declared the meeting closed.



## ANNEXE 1 - AGENDA

		Documents	Expected results
<b>Wednesday 23 February</b>			
<b>9.30</b>	<b>1. Opening of the meeting</b>  <i>Mr Jan Plesnik (Czech Republic), Chair of the Group of Specialists</i>		
	<b>2. Adoption of the agenda</b>	Meeting agenda T-PVS/Agenda(2022)02  <b>For adoption</b>	Members of the Group of Specialists are informed of the aims of the meeting and adopt the agenda.
	<b>3. General information on activities presenting an interest for the work of the Group of Specialists</b>		
	3.a Short presentation of the report of the meeting of the group in 2021 and of the activities undertaken during the last year  <i>Mr Jan Plesnik (Czech Republic), Chair of the Group of Specialists</i>	Report of the 2021 meeting of the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2021)06</a>  <b>For information</b>	The salient points of the 2021 meeting of the Group of Specialists are recalled.
	3.b Follow up by the Secretariat on the conclusions of the 2021 meeting of the Group of Specialists  <i>Presentation by the Secretariat</i>	Extract from the list of decisions and adopted texts on the European Diploma for Protected Areas, at the 41 <sup>st</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention <a href="#">T-PVS/DE (2022)04</a>	Members of the Group of Specialists are informed of the follow up given to the outcomes and decisions of the 2021 meeting of the Group of Specialists.



		<p>List of resolutions renewing the Diploma adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2021  <a href="#">CM/ResDip(2021)1</a>  <a href="#">CM/ResDip(2021)2</a></p> <p>List of resolutions extending the validity of the Diploma adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2021  <a href="#">CM/ResDip(2021)3</a></p> <p><b>For information</b></p>	
	<p><b>3.c 4. Consequences and lessons learnt from the COVID 19 pandemic</b></p> <p><i>Presentation by the Secretariat</i></p> <p><i>Members of the Group of Specialists are informed of the state of play of the on-the-spot appraisal visits and are invited to discuss the lessons learnt from the implementation of the scenario for virtual on-the-spot appraisal visits.</i></p>	<p>Status of the on-the-spot appraisal visits  <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)01</a></p> <p>Scenario for virtual on-the-spot appraisal visits  <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2021)02</a></p> <p><b>For discussion and decision</b></p>	<p>Members of the Group of Specialists provide guidance on how to absorb the backlog of on-the-spot appraisal visits and on whether the scenario for virtual on-the-spot appraisal visits should be revised or improved.</p>
	<p><b>5. Results of the advisory visits, discussion and proposals to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe</b></p>		
	<p>5.a Bayerischer Wald National Park (Germany)</p> <p><i>Presentation by Mr Robert Brunner</i></p> <p><i>Members of the Group of Specialists are invited to discuss the conclusions of the on-the-spot appraisal visit report and to exchange views on possible follow up.</i></p>	<p>Report on the assessment visit to the Bayerischer Wald National Park  <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)02</a></p> <p>Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for</p>	<p>Members of the Group of Specialists agree on a draft resolution renewing the European Diploma to the Bayerischer Wald National Park which will be sent to the Committee of Ministers for formal adoption.</p>

		Protected Areas awarded to the Bayerischer Wald National Park <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)09</a>  <b>For discussion and decision</b>	
	5.b Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve (Germany)  <i>Presentation by Mr Robert Brunner</i>  <i>Members of the Group of Specialists are invited to discuss the conclusions of the extra-ordinary on-the-spot appraisal visit report and to exchange views on possible follow up.</i>	Report on the extra-ordinary assessment visit to the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve  <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)03</a>  <b>For discussion and decision</b>	Members of the Group of Specialists agree on the follow up to be given to the conclusions of the extra-ordinary assessment visit to the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve.
	5.c Vanoise National Park (France)  <i>Presentation by Mr Pierre Galland</i>  <i>Members of the Group of Specialists are invited to discuss the conclusions of the on-the-spot appraisal visit report and to exchange views on possible follow up.</i>	Report on the assessment visit to the Vanoise National Park  <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)06</a>  Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Vanoise National Park <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)09</a>  <b>For discussion and decision</b>	Members of the Group of Specialists agree on a draft resolution renewing the European Diploma to the Vanoise National Park which will be sent to the Committee of Ministers for formal adoption.
	5.d Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy)  <i>Presentation by Mr Pierre Galland</i>  <i>Members of the Group of Specialists are invited to discuss the conclusions of the on-the-spot appraisal</i>	Report on the assessment visit to the Gran Paradiso National Park  <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)07</a>  Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for	Members of the Group of Specialists agree on a draft resolution renewing the European Diploma to the Gran Paradiso National Park which will be sent to the Committee of Ministers for formal adoption.

	<i>visit report and to exchange views on possible follow up.</i>	Protected Areas awarded to the Gran Paradiso National Park <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)09</a>  <b>For discussion and decision</b>	
	5.e Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site (Austria)  <i>Presentation by Mr Maurice Hoffmann</i>  <i>Members of the Group of Specialists are invited to discuss the conclusions of the on-the-spot appraisal visit report and to exchange views on possible follow up.</i>	Report on the assessment visit to the Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site  <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)08</a>  Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)09</a>  <b>For discussion and decision</b>	Members of the Group of Specialists agree on a draft resolution renewing the European Diploma to the Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site which will be sent to the Committee of Ministers for formal adoption.
	5.f Carpathian Biosphere Reserve (Ukraine)  <i>Presentation by Mr Bev Nichols</i>  <i>Members of the Group of Specialists are invited to discuss the conclusions of the on-the-spot appraisal visit report and to exchange views on possible follow up.</i>	Report on the assessment visit to the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve  <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)11</a>  Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)09</a>  <b>For discussion and decision</b>	Members of the Group of Specialists agree on a draft resolution renewing the European Diploma to the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve which will be sent to the Committee of Ministers for formal adoption.
	5.g Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve (Portugal)	Report on the assessment visit to the Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve	Members of the Group of Specialists agree on a draft resolution renewing the European Diploma to the Selvagens

	<p><i>Presentation by Ms Blanca Ramos</i></p> <p><i>Members of the Group of Specialists are invited to discuss the conclusions of the on-the-spot appraisal visit report and to exchange views on possible follow up.</i></p>	<p><a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2021)08</a></p> <p>Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve</p> <p><a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)09</a></p> <p><b>For discussion and decision</b></p>	<p>Islands Nature Reserve which will be sent to the Committee of Ministers for formal adoption.</p>
	<p>5.h Swiss National Park (Switzerland)</p> <p><i>Presentation by Mr Peter Skoberne</i></p> <p><i>Members of the Group of Specialists are invited to discuss the conclusions of the on-the-spot appraisal visit report and to exchange views on possible follow up.</i></p>	<p>Report on the assessment visit to the Swiss National Park</p> <p><a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)05</a></p> <p>Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Swiss National Park</p> <p><a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)09</a></p> <p><b>For discussion and decision</b></p>	<p>Members of the Group of Specialists agree on a draft resolution renewing the European Diploma to the Swiss National Park which will be sent to the Committee of Ministers for formal adoption.</p>
	<p><b>6. Presentation of the reporting results by the Secretariat and the Group of Specialists</b></p>		
	<p>6.a Analysis of the annual reports</p> <p><i>Introduction by the Secretariat</i></p> <p><i>Members of the Group of Specialists are invited to share their comments on and discuss the outcomes of the annual reports and exchange views on possible follow up.</i></p>	<p>Compilation of the analysis of the annual reports</p> <p><a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)10</a></p> <p><a href="#">Link to the dashboard of the European Diploma for Protected Areas</a></p>	<p>The compliance of the Diploma holding areas with the conditions and/or recommendations attached to the award/renewal of the European Diploma is assessed and possible areas at risk requiring a closer monitoring or even an exceptional on-the-spot appraisal visit are identified.</p>

		<b>For discussion and decision</b>	
	<p>6.b Follow up on the areas identified in 2021 as requiring particular attention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scandola Nature Reserve (France)</li> <li>• Doñana National Park (Spain) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <a href="#">Judgment of the European Court of Justice of 24 June 2021</a></li> <li>➤ <a href="#">Report on the Joint WHC / IUCN / RAMSAR Reactive monitoring mission to Doñana National Park, Spain (25-28 February 2020)</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve (Germany)</li> <li>• Abruzzo Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy)</li> <li>• Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve (Germany)</li> <li>• Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve (Germany)</li> <li>• Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park (Belarus)</li> <li>• Thayatal National Park (Austria)</li> </ul> <p><i>Members of the Group of Specialists are invited to exchange views on the situation of Diploma holding areas identified as requiring closer attention and to agree on follow up actions in the light of the 2021 annual reports and the information received by the Secretariat.</i></p>	<p>Compilation of the analysis of the annual reports</p> <p><a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)10</a></p> <p><b>For discussion and decision</b></p>	<p>Follow up on the monitoring of Diploma-holding areas requiring particular attention is agreed on.</p>
	<p><b>7. On-the-spot appraisal visits in 2022</b></p> <p><i>Members of the Group of Specialists are invited to exchange views on the on-the-spot appraisal visits to be carried out in 2022</i></p>	<p>Status of the on-the-spot appraisal visits</p> <p><a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2022)01</a></p> <p><b>For discussion and decision</b></p>	<p>Diploma holding areas whose Diploma is due in 2023 and for which an-the-spot appraisal visit is to take place in 2022 are identified.</p>

	<p><b>8. Follow up on the communication strategy for the European Diploma</b></p> <p><i>Presentation by the Secretariat</i></p> <p><i>Members of the Group of Specialists are informed of the follow up given to the communication plan discussed last year and to provide insight on how to further elaborate on it.</i></p>	<p><a href="#">Link</a> to the virtual exhibition of the European Diploma for Protected Areas</p> <p><a href="#">Link</a> to the new webpage of the European Diploma</p> <p>Communication plan for the European Diploma <a href="#">T-PVS/DE(2021)03rev</a></p> <p><b>For information</b></p>	<p>Members of the Group of Specialists agree on priority actions for promoting the European Diploma.</p>
	<p><b>9. Creation of a pool of independent experts – results of the call for manifestation of interest</b></p> <p><i>Presentation by the Secretariat</i></p> <p><i>Members of the Group of Specialists are informed of the results of the call for manifestation of interest to constitute a pool of independent experts.</i></p>	<p><b>For information</b></p>	<p>Members of the Group of Specialists take note of the information provided.</p>
	<p><b>10. Any other business</b></p>		
	<p><b>11. Date and place of the next meeting</b></p>		
	<p><b>12. Conclusions of the meeting</b></p>		
<p><b>12.30</b></p>	<p><i>Thursday 24 February</i></p> <p><b>End of the meeting</b></p>		

**ANNEXE 2 - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS****CHAIR OF THE GROUP OF SPECIALISTS /  
PRESIDENT DU GROUPE DE SPECIALISTES****CZECH REPUBLIC / REPUBLIQUE TCHEQUE****Mr Jan PLESNIK**

Adviser to Director

Nature Conservation Agency (NCA CR)

**SPECIALISTS / SPECIALISTES****FINLAND / FINLANDE****Ms Tiina KANERVA**

Senior Advisor

Metsähallitus Parks &amp; Wildlife Finland

**GERMANY / ALLEMAGNE****Ms Stefanie STENZEL**

BfN Federal Agency for Nature Conservation

Biotope protection and management, protected areas

**GREECE / GRECE****Mr Panagiotis DIMITRAKOPOULOS**

Professor

Department of Environment

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**SLOVENIA / SLOVÉNIE****Ms Sabina JEREB**

Secretary

Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning

Directorate for the Environment, Legal System and Administrative Affairs Division

*apologized / excusée***SPAIN / ESPAGNE****Mr Pep AMENGUAL**

Area de Conservación, Seguimiento y Programas de la Red

Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica

**CONSULTANTS / EXPERTS****Mr Robert BRUNNER***Presentation: Bayerischer Wald National Park and Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve, Germany***Mr Pierre GALLAND***Presentation: Vanoise National Park, France and Gran Paradiso National Park, Italy*

**Mr Maurice HOFFMANN**

*Presentation: Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site, Austria*

**Mr Bev NICHOLS**

*Presentation: Carpathian Biosphere Reserve, Ukraine*

**Ms Blanca RAMOS LOSADA**

*Presentation: Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve, Portugal*

**Mr Peter SKOBERNE**

*Presentation: Swiss National Park, Switzerland*

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE / CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE**

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