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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

38th meeting
Strasbourg, 26-30 November 2018

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

21 – 22 February 2018
Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, Room 8

MEETING REPORT

*Document prepared
by the Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation*

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1. WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

The meeting was opened on Wednesday 21 February 2018 by the new member and incoming Chair, Mr Jan Plesnik (Czech Republic). The Chair welcomed the participants and thanked them for their contribution as well as the Secretariat for the preparation of the meeting and of the working documents.

The Chair invited the participants for a “tour de table” to introduce themselves to the new members from Austria and Georgia.

On behalf of the Secretariat, Eladio Fernandez-Galiano informed the Group that in 2017 the programme of activity of the European Diploma was successfully implemented and that the amendments to the regulations of the European Diploma as proposed by the Group of Specialists in 2016 were finally endorsed by the Committee of Ministers on 31 January 2018.

The list of participants can be found [here](#).

2. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA

The Group adopted the draft agenda (see document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)01](#))

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

3.1 SHORT PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE GROUP IN 2017 AND OF THE ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN DURING THE LAST YEAR

The Chair briefly wrapped up the outcomes of the work of the Group during 2017.

3.2 FOLLOW UP BY THE SECRETARIAT ON THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE 2017 MEETING OF THE GROUP OF SPECIALISTS

Iva Obretenova, Secretary of the Bern Convention, reported on the follow up given to the decisions of the Group of Specialists at its meeting in 2017. She highlighted that the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention took note that the Białowieża National Park was not holding the European Diploma anymore and agreed on submitting to the Committee of Ministers for formal approval the draft Resolutions renewing the European Diploma to 7 areas examined by the Group of Specialists in 2017.

She also informed the participants that the Secretariat worked on the strategic development of the European Diploma with a view to harmonize both the annual reports of the Diploma holding areas and the reports of the independent experts and to improve the visibility of the Diploma.

4. DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE CONDITIONS AND THE RECOMMENDATIONS ATTACHED TO THE AWARD OR THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

Mr Michael Usher introduced the discussion paper defining the difference between “conditions” and “recommendations” attached to the Resolutions awarding or renewing the European Diploma. Discussions about the distinction between the recommendations and the conditions are recurrent when examining the conclusions of the on-the-spot appraisal visits.

The Group of Specialists acknowledged that a common approach will contribute to harmonise the conclusions of the independent experts and the decisions of the Group of Specialists.

Starting from the two main criteria set in the Revised Regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas [CM/ResDip\(2008\)1](#) : the exceptional European interest and the existence of protection measures, the Group of Specialists considered that conditions are essential for the maintenance of the pan-European values of the area and must be acted upon by the authorities within a clear deadline. In the case they are not fulfilled, there are arguments for either withdrawing or not renewing the European Diploma.

Recommendations are suggestions for improvements which should be given serious consideration by the authorities.

The members of the Group of Specialists welcomed the document prepared by Michael Usher and agreed on the common approach to distinguish between conditions and recommendations, provided that deadlines and/or timelines are set for the authorities to conform to the conditions.

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat to append the document to the mandate of the independent experts carrying out on-the-spot appraisal visits.

The final document can be seen at following link: [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)06](#)

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

The Group of Specialists examined the on-the-spot appraisal visit reports of 13 areas whose European Diploma will expire in 2018 and could be renewed.

a. Oka National Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation)

The independent expert, Ms Blanca Ramos, presented the outcomes of her on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Oka National Biosphere Reserve to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2017\)22](#)). Based on her findings she suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Oka National Biosphere Reserve 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 five recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Oka National Biosphere Reserve as reflected in the draft resolution in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 2018.

b. Mercantour National Park (France)

The independent expert, Mr Olivier Biber, presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Mercantour National Park to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)05](#)). Based on his findings he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Mercantour 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 five recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Mercantour National Park as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 2018.

c. Montecristo Island (Italy)

The independent expert, Mr Olivier Biber presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Montecristo Island to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)04](#)). Based on his findings he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Montecristo Island 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 six recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Montecristo Island as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 2018.

d. Dobrocsky Prales National Nature Reserve (Slovak Republic)

The independent expert, Mr Robert Brunner presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Dobrocsky Prales National Nature Reserve to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2017\)19](#)). Based on his findings he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Dobrocsky National Nature Reserve 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 one condition and four recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Dobrocsky Prales National Nature Reserve as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 2018.

e. Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria)

The independent expert, Mr Pierre Galland presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Central Balkan National Park to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2017\)27](#)). Based on his findings he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Central Balkan 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 eight recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Central Balkan National Park as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with the follow up on the endorsement of the draft resolution by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention and its possible official adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

f. Volcanic Phenomena of the Tihany Peninsula (Hungary)

The independent expert, Mr Pierre Galland presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Volcanic Phenomena of the Tihany Peninsula to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2017\)16](#)). Based on his findings, he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Volcanic Phenomena of the Tihany Peninsula 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 nine recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Volcanic Phenomena of the Tihany Peninsula as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 2018.

g. Belovezhskaya Puscha National Park (Belarus)

The independent expert, Mr Hervé Lethier presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Belovezhskaya Puscha National Park to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2017\)15](#)). Based on his findings, he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Belovezhskaya Puscha 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 one condition and thirteen recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Belovezhskaya Puscha National Park as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 official possible adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

h. Teberda National Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation)

The independent expert, Mr Hervé Lethier presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Teberda National Biosphere Reserve to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2017\)23](#)). Based on his findings, he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Teberda National Biosphere Reserve 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 six recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Teberda National Biosphere Reserve as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with the follow up on the endorsement of the draft resolution by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention and its official possible adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

i. Khosrov Forest Reserve (Armenia)

The independent expert, Mr Hervé Lethier presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Khosrov Forest Reserve to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2017\)17](#)). Based on his findings, he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Khosrov Forest Reserve 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 three conditions and three recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Khosrov Forest Reserve as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 official possible adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

j. Poloniny National Park (Slovak Republic)

The independent expert, Mr Michael Usher presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Poloniny National Park to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2017\)20](#)). Based on his findings, he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Poloniny 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 three conditions and eight recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Poloniny National Park as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 official possible adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

k. The Burren Region (Ireland)

The independent expert, Mr Michael Usher presented the outcomes of his on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Burren Region to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2017\)18](#)). Based on his findings, he suggested the renewal of the European Diploma of the Burren Region 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 one condition and four recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Burren Region as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 official possible adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

l. Naardermeer Nature Reserve (The Netherlands)

In the absence of the independent expert, Ms Ana Rainho, the Secretariat presented the outcomes of Ana Rainho's on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Naardermeer Nature Reserve to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2017\)24](#)). Based on Ana Rainho's findings, the renewal of the European Diploma of the Naardermeer Nature Reserve for an additional period of 10 years was suggested.

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 seven recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Naardermeer Nature Reserve as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 official possible adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

m. Maritime Alps Nature Park (Italy)

In the absence of the independent expert, Mr Joe Sultana, the Secretariat presented the outcomes of Joe Sultana's on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Maritime Alps Nature Park to the members of the Group of Specialists (report [T-PVS/DE\(2017\)21](#)). Based on Joe Sultana's findings, the renewal of the European Diploma of the Maritime Alps Nature Park for an additional period of 10 years was suggested.

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 four recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Maritime Alps Nature Park as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 official possible adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

n. Bieszczady National Park (Poland)

At its 2016 annual meeting, the Group of Specialists considered that the Bieszczady National Park did not require an on-the-spot appraisal visit.

Based on the recent annual reports submitted by the Bieszczady National Park authorities, the Secretariat informed the Group of Specialists that the area was still complying with the criteria of the European Diploma and that the condition and recommendations attached to the previous renewal decision were fully or partially implemented.

The Secretariat proposed the renewal of the Diploma of the Bieszczady National Park for an additional period of 10 years accompanying the renewal proposal with six recommendations drafted in consultation with the network of independent experts and with the Bieszczady National Park authorities.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the proposal of the Secretariat and following their discussion endorsed a draft resolution attaching six recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Bieszczady National Park as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 official possible adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

o. Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve (UK)

At its 2016 annual meeting, the Group of Specialists considered that the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve did not require an on-the-spot appraisal visit.

Based on the recent annual reports submitted by Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve authorities, the Secretariat informed the Group of Specialists that the area was still complying with the criteria of the European Diploma and that the recommendations attached to the previous renewal decision were fully or partially implemented.

The Secretariat proposed the renewal of the Diploma of the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve for an additional period of 10 years accompanying the renewal proposal with five recommendations drafted in consultation with the network of independent experts and with the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve authorities.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the proposal of the Secretariat and following their discussion endorsed a draft resolution attaching five recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

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 official possible adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

p. Thayatal National Park (Austria)

At its 2016 annual meeting, the Group of Specialists considered that the Thayatal National Park did not require an on-the-spot appraisal visit as an exceptional visit was carried out in 2014.

Based on the recent annual reports submitted by the Thayatal National Park authorities and on the findings of the 2014 exceptional on-the-spot appraisal visit, the Secretariat informed the Group of Specialists that the area was still complying with the criteria of the European Diploma and that the recommendations attached to the previous renewal decision were fully or partially implemented.

The Secretariat proposed the renewal of the Diploma of the Thayatal National Park for an additional period of 10 years accompanying the renewal proposal with six recommendations drafted in consultation with the network of independent experts and with the Thayatal National Park authorities.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed with the proposal of the Secretariat and following their discussion endorsed a draft resolution attaching three conditions and eight recommendations to the renewal of the European Diploma of the Thayatal National Park as reflected in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)08](#).

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with the follow up on the endorsement of the draft resolution by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention and its official possible adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

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

The Secretariat reminded 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.

In 2017, 63 annual reports out of 73 Diploma holding areas were submitted which is a stable number compared to 2016. The rate reaches 86.3 % and is however slightly higher than in 2016 as there are less Diploma holding areas.

The Secretariat drew the attention of the members of the Group to the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)09](#) which presents the state of submission of the annual reports since 2012. It can be noticed that 2 areas (Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve and Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park) have not submitted a single report since 2012, and 1 area (Scandola Nature Reserve) has not submitted any report for the last 5 years. Several areas (Teide National Park, Mercantour National Park, Port-Cros National Park, Bilé Karpaty Protected Landscape Area and Retezat National Park) have submitted reports sporadically since 2012.

A part of the on-the-spot appraisal visits which take place in most of the cases every 10 years, the annual reports are the major source of information for monitoring what is on-going in the Diploma holding areas and alerting the Group of Specialists on possible threats.

A strong statement should be made by the Group of Specialists regarding the compulsory character of the annual reports as set in the Revised Regulations of the European Diploma.

The Secretariat further informed the Group of Specialists that the purpose of the analysis of the 2017 annual reports received was to assess the extent to which Diploma holding areas have implemented measures in order to comply with the conditions and/or recommendations attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma.

The document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)10](#) provides the conclusions of the Group for each Diploma holding area.

The Group of Specialists strongly regretted the absence of reporting from the Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve and Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park since 2012 and from the Scandola Nature Reserve since 2013 and the lack of reporting from Teide National Park, Mercantour National Park, Port-Cros National Park, Bilé Karpaty Protected Landscape Area and Retezat National Park.

The members of the Group of Specialists agreed on:

- Adding to the preamble of the Draft Resolutions awarding or renewing the European Diploma a reference to the necessity to comply with the regulations of the European Diploma which would read:

“Noting that holding the European Diploma implies the maintenance of the exceptional European interest, the continuance of the exemplary management and the compliance with the provisions of Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 especially with regard to the obligations to report annually and to give appropriate visibility to the European Diploma”

- Developing a scoring system which would acknowledge the compliance of the Diploma holding areas with the annual reporting obligations and which would be visible from the webpages of the European Diploma.
- Requiring the managers of the Diploma holding areas to reflect in the annual reports on the threats and risks they face.

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

a. Follow up on the areas identified in 2017 as requiring particular attention: Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve (Germany), Abruzzo Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy)

➤ Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve (Germany)

The area is under scrutiny because the regional authorities (Landkreis Heidekreis) are planning 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 the black stork and destroy an important habitat for bats and birds, including red kites (*Milvus milvus*).

While in 2014, the Higher Administrative Court of Lower Saxony declared the planning document inaccurate and removed the zoning for Volkwardingen Wind Park, the regional authorities pursued the works on a zone for wind energy in the same area.

In 2016, the Group of Specialists expressed concern over the allegedly ongoing windmill zoning for the Volkwardingen Wind Park despite the court decision of 2014 to remove it. It asked the authorities to report on the issue and to keep it under review.

At its 2017 meeting, the Group highlighted the possibility of submitting a complaint under the case-file system of the Bern Convention.

While in the 2017 annual report, the authorities of the Nature Reserve do not stress anymore the ongoing plans of the regional authorities to build a wind park in the area of the Nature Reserve, they report however facing quite significant difficulties with the implementation of the recommendations attached to the Diploma. There are shortcomings in almost all of the 13 recommendations.

The Group of Specialists expressed its concern regarding the lack of progress achieved in the implementation of the recommendations attached to the Resolution renewing the European Diploma of the Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve.

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with liaising with the Federal authorities to understand the situation and clarify the current relationship with the authorities of the Nature Reserve.

➤ **Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy)**

The main issue continues to be the official adoption of a new management plan, due by 2013.

Furthermore, in the light of the information received in 2015, the decline of the Marsican brown bear (*Ursus arctos marsicanus*) classified as strictly protected under Appendix II to the Bern Convention continues to remain an issue of concern.

In 2016 the Group of Specialists exhorted the authorities to adopt the management plan for the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park and to define the contiguous areas.

In March 2017 the Group of Specialists urged the authorities to speed up the adoption process of the Management Plan.

Within the 2017 reporting period, although the management plan is still in the approval process, specific management measures were carried out within the framework of the EU Natura 2000 network. Conservation objectives were adopted by the Ministry of Environment for the two Special Areas of Conservations designated in 2017 and located within the National Park.

Regarding the definition of the contiguous areas, municipalities required the revision of the cartography which delayed again the decision making process.

The authorities also reported that conservation measures for the Marsican brown bear continue to be implemented.

The Group of Specialists welcomed some progress in implementing the recommendations attached to the European Diploma of the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park and decided to re-examine the situation at its meeting in 2019.

b. Development of an airport in the vicinity of "De Oostvaardersplassen" Nature Reserve (the Netherlands) and the National Park Weerribben-Wieden (the Netherlands)

In the course of 2017, the Secretariat was approached by Dutch environment activists regarding the development of an existing small aviation airport into an international "Holiday" airport in the vicinity of two Diploma holding areas.

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment of the Netherlands decided to start in 2018 the development of the Lelystad airport with holiday flights in Europe and around the Mediterranean Sea. Up to 45,000 flights would transit through the Lelystad airport and relieve the saturated traffic of Schipol airport. The opening of the Lelystad airport is planned in April 2019.

The opening of new flight routes might cause disturbance to a large number of Natura 2000 sites and specifically to the Diploma holding areas of the Natural Park Weerribben-Wieden and of De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve.

According to the 2017 annual reports from both areas, the authorities of De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve state that airplanes will fly over the reserve only at high altitude and ascending and descending flight movements will not take place above the nature reserve.

At the contrary the authorities of the National Park Weerribben-Wieden estimate that one of the routes will fly over the nature reserve and generate a type of holding stack above the National Park, where airplanes will continue to circle until they receive permission to land at the Lelystad Airport. They are cautious regarding the impact in terms of emissions and noise above the area and the resulting disruption to people and animals.

Considering that the renewal of the Diplomas of both areas is to be examined in 2018 and 2019 the Group of Specialists agreed that a combined visit to both the National Park Weerribben-Wieden and the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve should be carried out in 2018 in order to assess whether the development of the Lelystad airport will impact on the European interest of both Diploma holding areas.

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with following up on this with the authorities of both the National Park Weerribben-Wieden and the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve and to organise a combined on-the-spot appraisal visit.

c. The momentary non-application to the renewal of the European Diploma by the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park

In 2016 the Group of Specialist decided on an on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park in order to assess the opportunity of the renewal of its European Diploma in 2018. The visit was first postponed from 2016 to 2017 because no suitable time slot could be identified and in 2017 the authorities informed the Secretariat that the park was not seeking for the renewal of the Diploma anymore.

Repeated requests for explanations to the authorities have remained unanswered. Thanks to the facilitation of the Representative of Luxembourg at the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, the Secretariat managed to figure out that the Luxembourg part of the trans-frontier Diploma holding area does not benefit from the same status as the other Luxembourg Natural Parks. Indeed the authorities of the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park were seeking for closer cooperation and for finding synergies with the Our and Muellerthal Natural Parks which are surrounding and partially overlapping with the Luxembourg part of the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park.

The authorities would welcome an on-the-spot appraisal visit in the coming year which would also be an opportunity to meet with the authorities of the surrounding Natural Parks and to federate them around the values of the European Diploma.

The Group of Specialists decided not to renew the European Diploma of the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park until an on-the-spot appraisal visits can take place and confirms that the European interest of the area was maintained since the last renewal of the Diploma.

The Group of Specialist entrusted the Secretariat with the follow up on the evolvement of the situation with the national authorities and the authorities of the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park and to report to the Group at its 2019 annual meeting.

d. List of areas to be visited in 2018 and 2019 with a view to a renewal of their Diploma in 2020

The Secretariat reminded the Group of Specialists that from the 13 areas whose Diploma is due in 2019, 3 already benefited from an on-the-spot appraisal visit in 2017 (Oka National Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation), Teberda National Biosphere (Russian Federation) and Naardermeer Nature Reserve (The Netherlands)). There are still 10 Diploma holding areas which could be visited in 2018.

The Secretariat stressed that among them there is the Wachau Protected Landscape which requires an on-the-spot appraisal visit, the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (see item 7b), the Teide National Park which submitted only one annual report since 2012, the Minsmere Nature Reserve which reports on the construction of a nuclear reactor in the south of the area.

In 2019, there are 17 areas to be potentially visited with a view of the renewal of their Diploma in 2020. Among them there is the Scandola Nature Reserve which did not submit an annual report since 2012 and the National Park Weerribben-Wieden whose visit should be combined with the De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (see item 7b).

The Group of Specialists decided to carry out on-the-spot appraisal visits to following areas with a view to the renewal of their Diploma in 2019:

Name of the area	Country	Award date	Last visit	Visit in 2018
Wollmatinger Ried Untersee-Gnadensee Nature Reserve	Germany	29.11.68	17-19.06.2008	Robert Brunner Combined with Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve
Cretan White Mountains National Park	Greece	13.09.79	7-8.07.2008	No visit
Minsmere Nature Reserve	United Kingdom	13.09.79	20-21.06.1998	Blanca Ramos
Purbeck Heritage Coast	United Kingdom	22.06.84	16-18.07.1998	Ana Rainho
Wurzacher Ried Nature Reserve	Germany	18.06.89	19-20.06.2008	Robert Brunner Combined with Wollmatinger Ried Untersee-Gnadensee Nature Reserve
Teide National Park	Spain	18.06.89	29-30.09.2008	Michael Usher
Wachau Protected Landscape	Austria	05.09.94	9-10.07.2003	Pierre Galland
Oka National Biosphere Reserve	Russian Federation	05.09.94	6-7.10.2008	Done in 2017
Teberda National Biosphere Reserve	Russian Federation	05.09.94	9-10.10.2008	Done in 2017
De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve	Netherlands	09.09.99	18-19.09.2009	Hervé Lethier Combined with National Park Weerribben-Wieden

Triglav National Park	Slovenia	05.05.04	7-8.07.2008	Pierre Galland
Naardemeer Nature Reserve	Netherlands	05.05.04	16-17.09.2008	Done in 2017
Desertas Nature Reserve	Portugal	02.07.14	10-12.06.2013	No visit

The Group of Specialists decided to anticipate the visits to following areas with a view to the renewal of their Diploma in 2020:

Name of the area	Country	Award date	Last visit	Visit in 2018
Boschplaat Nature Reserve	Netherlands	02.07.70	25-28.08.1999	Michael Usher
Fair Isle National Scenic Area	United Kingdom	23.09.85	22-25.06.2004	2019
Scandola Nature Reserve	France	23.09.85	29-30.06.1999	Olivier Biber
Sasso Fratino Integral Nature Reserve	Italy	23.09.85	24-26.05.2004	2019
Doñana National Park	Spain	23.09.85	22-24.04.2004	2019
Berchtesgaden National Park	Germany	18.06.90	30.08-03.09.2009	2019
Ecrins National Park	France	18.06.90	9-11.08.1999	Olivier Biber
Ipolytarnóc Protected Area	Hungary	07.11.95	12-13.08.1999	2019
Szénás Hills Protected Area	Hungary	07.11.95	10-11.08.1999	2019
Berezinsky State Biosphere Reserve	Belarus	07.11.95	6-9.07.2009	2019
National Park Weerribben-Wieden	Netherlands	07.11.95	22-23.09.2009	Hervé Lethier Combined with De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve

Bilé Karpaty Protected Landscape Area	Czech Republic	21.06.2000	13-22.07.2009	2019
Karlštejn National Nature Reserve	Czech Republic	21.06.2000	13-22.07.2009	2019
Podyjí National Park	Czech Republic	21.06.2000	13-22.07.2009	2019
Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve	Romania	21.06.2000	5-11.05.2004	2019
Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli	Italy	15.06.2005	11-12.06.2009	2019
Vashlovani Protected Areas	Georgia	03.06.2015	29.09-01.10.2014	2019

8. HARMONISATION OF THE REPORTING

a. Check list for on-the-spot appraisal visits

As per the conclusions of the 2017 meeting of the Group of Specialists, the Secretariat has prepared in consultation with several independent experts a check list for independent experts carrying out on-the-spot appraisal visits to candidate or already Diploma holding areas candidate to the renewal of the Diploma.

The check list is presented in the document [T-PVS/DE\(2018\)07](#)

The aim of the check list is to list the issues the experts should tackle during their visits and to provide an outline for their reports. This will contribute to the on-going harmonisation of the reporting. The check list is based on the regulations of the European Diploma and its annexes.

The Group of Specialists welcomed the check list and acknowledged its usefulness with a view to make the on-the-spot appraisal reports more similar and their assessment more user-friendly.

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with enclosing the check list to the invitation letters mandating independent experts for carrying out on-the-spot appraisal visits.

b. Online reporting tool

As announced at the 2017 meeting of the Group of Specialists, the Secretariat has explored the feasibility of designing an online tool for the annual reporting. Such a tool would be an asset for the monitoring of the Diploma holding areas, enlarge the access to the reports to third parties and especially NGOs, make all relevant information regarding each Diploma holding areas accessible in one place and enable to measure progress over the years.

The development of such a tool would require an investment of between 15,000 and 20,000 € which the Secretariat cannot afford under the current budgetary situation.

As an alternative, the Secretariat proposes to reshuffle the website of the European Diploma and to create a dashboard of Diploma holding areas with links whenever possible to application files, to annual reports, their assessment, and to the reports of the on-the-spot appraisal visits.

The Group of Specialist agreed with the alternative proposed and entrusted the Secretariat with the creation of an online dashboard of Diploma holding areas.

c. Update of the database of the Diploma holding areas

A very simple database presenting area codes, area names, surfaces, and dates of Diploma awards was created some time ago and published by the European Environment Agency (EEA) on the Common Database of Designated Areas (CDDA).

In the case the database would be updated and complemented, it could also be uploaded on the World Database on Protected Areas / Protected Planet and give even additional visibility to the European Diploma and to the Diploma holding areas.

In 2012, the Group of Specialists discussed the document [T-PVS/DE\(2012\)11](#) presenting the different types of habitat and geographical regions already represented in the network of Diploma holding areas so as to identify any gaps.

The data collected was extracted from the Diploma holding areas application forms.

The Secretariat proposed to launch an updating process of the database of the Diploma holding areas grounded either on a questionnaire or on the Standard Data Form (SDF) in force the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest. As a result, it expects to get an up-to-date picture of the boundaries and of the species and habitats occurring in the Diploma holding areas.

The Group of Specialists welcomed the initiative to update the databases of the Diploma holding areas and entrusted the Secretariat with initiating the process.

9. VIDEO IN THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

The Secretariat presented to the Group of Specialists the [video on the European Diploma](#) produced in 2017 and invited the members of the Group and the experts to disseminate it among their respective networks.

The Group appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat for improving the communication and raising public awareness about the European Diploma.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- The Secretariat informed the Group of Specialists on the joined meeting of Group of Experts on Climate Change and of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks scheduled beginning of October 2018. At this occasion it foresees to invite some managers of Diploma holding areas already working on climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.
- The independent experts, M. Pierre Galland also brought to the attention of the Group of Specialists the [IUCN publication](#) “Harmonising the management of Multi-Internationally Designated Areas: Ramsar Sites, World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves and UNESCO Global Geoparks”.

The Group of Specialists entrusted the Secretariat with the inventory of the other international designations granted to the Diploma holding areas. The aim of this exercise is to improve the coordination of the monitoring of the European Diploma with other designation, to inform about the possible existence of complementary monitoring reports and to create synergies.

11. CONCLUSIONS OF THE MEETING

The Chair thanked the members of the Group, the independent experts and the Secretariat for their contribution and dedication to the work of the Group of Specialists and declared the meeting closed.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Secretariat would notify members of the date of the next meeting, to be held in 2019, in due course.

Appendix 1 – Agenda

WEDNESDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2018

9h00 – 9h40 Welcome and opening of the meeting

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING BY THE CHAIR

Mr Jan Plesnik (Czech Republic), Chair of the Group of Specialists

2. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA

[Document T-PVS/DE (2018)01]

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

SHORT PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE GROUP IN 2017 AND OF THE ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN DURING THE LAST YEAR

Mr Jan Plesnik, Chair of the Group of Specialists

FOLLOW UP BY THE SECRETARIAT ON THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE 2017 MEETING OF THE GROUP OF SPECIALISTS

Ms Iva Obretenova, Secretariat of the Bern Convention

Report of meeting of the GS EDPA [T-PVS/DE (2017) 14]

Extract from the list of decisions and adopted texts on the European Diploma for Protected Areas, at the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention [T-PVS/DE (2018) 02]

9h40 – 10h30 Assessment reports with a view to the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas

4. DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE CONDITIONS AND THE RECOMMENDATIONS ATTACHED TO THE AWARD OR THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

Discussion paper on the « Conditions » and « Recommendations » attached to the European Diploma on Protected Areas [T-PVS/DE (2018) 06]

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

- Oka National Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation) by Ms Blanca Ramos (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

Report on the assessment visit to the Oka National Biosphere Reserve [T-PVS/DE (2017) 22]

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Oka National Biosphere Reserve [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

10h30 – 10h50 COFFEE BREAK

- Mercantour National Park (France) by Mr Olivier Biber (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

Report on the assessment visit to the Mercantour National Park [T-PVS/DE (2018) 05]

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Mercantour National Park [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

- Montecristo Island (Italy) by Mr Olivier Biber (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

Report on the assessment visit to the Montecristo Island [T-PVS/DE (2018) 04]

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Montecristo Island [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

- Dobrocsky National Nature Reserve (Slovak Republic) by Mr Robert Brunner (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

Report on the assessment visit to the Dobrocsky National Nature Reserve [T-PVS/DE (2017) 19]

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Dobrocsky National Nature Reserve [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

- Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria) by Mr Pierre Galland (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

Report on the assessment visit to the Central Balkan National Park [T-PVS/DE (2017) 27]

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Central Balkan National Park [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

12h30 – 14h00 LUNCH BREAK

14h00– 16h00 Assessment reports with a view to the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas (continued)

- Volcanic Phenomena of the Tihany Peninsula (Hungary) by Mr Pierre Galland (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

Report on the assessment visit to the Volcanic Phenomena of the Tihany Peninsula [T-PVS/DE (2017) 16]

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Volcanic Phenomena of the Tihany Peninsula [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

- Belovezhskaya Puscha National Park (Belarus) by Mr Hervé Lethier (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

Report on the assessment visit to the Belovezhskaya Puscha National Park [T-PVS/DE (2017) 15]

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Belovezhskaya Puscha National Park [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

- Teberda National Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation) by Mr Hervé Lethier (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

Report on the assessment visit to the Teberda National Biosphere Reserve [T-PVS/DE (2017) 23]

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Teberda National Biosphere Reserve [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

- Khosrov Forest Reserve (Armenia) by Mr Hervé Lethier (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

Report on the assessment visit to the Khosrov Forest Reserve [T-PVS/DE (2017) 17]

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Khosrov Forest Reserve [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

15h40 – 16h00 Coffee Break

16h00– 18h00 Assessment reports with a view to the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas (continued)

- Poloniny National Park (Slovak Republic) by Mr Michael Usher (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

**Report on the assessment visit to Poloniny National Park [T-PVS/DE (2017) 20]
Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Poloniny National Park [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]**

- The Burren Region (Ireland) by Mr Michael Usher (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

**Report on the assessment visit to the Burren Region [T-PVS/DE (2017) 18]
Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Burren Region [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]**

- Naardermeer Nature Reserve (The Netherlands) by Ms Ana Rainho (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

**Report on the assessment visit to the Naardermeer Nature Reserve [T-PVS/DE (2017) 24]
Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Naardermeer Nature Reserve [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]**

- Maritime Alps Nature Park (Italy) by Mr Joe Sultana (10 minutes presentation, 15 minutes discussion)

**Report on the assessment visit to the Maritime Alps Nature Park [T-PVS/DE (2017) 21]
Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Maritime Alps Nature Park [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]**

RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA TO AREAS WHICH DID NOT BENEFIT FROM AN ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL VISIT

- Thayatal National Park (Austria)

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Thayatal National Park (Austria) [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

- Bieszczady National Park (Poland)

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Bieszczady National Park [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

- Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve (UK)

Draft resolution regarding the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve [T-PVS/DE (2018) 08]

THURSDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2018

9h00 – 10h30 Annual reports 2017

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

- Suggested actions
- Possible exceptional on-the-spot appraisals to be carried out in 2018

Compilation of annual reports by EDPA zones [T-PVS/DE (2018) 03]

Compilation of the analysis of the annual reports [T-PVS/DE (2018) 10]

Follow-up table of the annual reports [T-PVS/DE (2018) 09]

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

- Follow up on the areas identified in 2017 as requiring particular attention: Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve (Germany), Abruzzo Lazio and Molise National Park (Italy)
- Development of an airport in the vicinity of "De Oostvaardersplassen" Nature Reserve (the Netherlands) and the National Park Weerribben-Wieden (the Netherlands)
- The momentary non-application to the renewal of the European Diploma by the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park
- Draft list of areas to be visited in 2018 and 2019 with a view to a renewal of their Diploma in 2019 and 2020*

* In 2018, 10 assessment visits are expected to be carried out with a view to the renewal of the Diploma of the areas concerned in 2019. These 10 visits complement the 3 visits already carried out in 2017. In 2019, there are 17 such areas for possible renewal of their Diploma in 2020. The Group of Specialists should identify priority areas for appraisals in 2018 and 2019.

Compilation of the analysis of the annual reports [T-PVS/DE (2018) 10]

List of areas whose Diploma should be renewed in 2019 [T-PVS/DE (2017) 08]

List of areas whose Diploma should be renewed in 2020 [T-PVS/DE (2017) 25]

10h30 – 10h50 Coffee break

10h50 – 12h30 Strategic development of the European Diploma

8. HARMONISATION OF THE REPORTING

- Check list for on-the-spot appraisal visits

Check list for independent experts [T-PVS/DE (2018) 07]

- Online reporting tool

- Update of the database of the Diploma holding areas

Analysis of the different types of habitats and biogeographic regions represented in the Diploma holding areas [T-PVS/DE (2012)11]

9. VIDEO ON THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

[Link](#) to the video on the European Diploma for Protected Areas

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

11. CONCLUSIONS OF THE MEETING

12. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING