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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

41st meeting
29 November - 3 December 2021

GROUP OF EXPERTS ON INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

14th meeting (virtual)
Tuesday, 6th July 2021, 9.30 am – 2.30 pm (CEST)

-MEETING REPORT-

*Document prepared by the Directorate of Democratic
Participation*

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- take note of the report of the 14th meeting of the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species which took place virtually on the 6th July 2021;
- Take note of the proposals by the Group for its future areas of work;
- Take note of the Guidance on e-commerce and IAS;
- Discuss and, if appropriate, adopt the draft Recommendation on e-commerce and IAS;
- Take note of the envisaged updates of the Report on Alien Pathogens and Pathogens spread by IAS;
- Take note of the state of play of the elaboration of the Guidance on Communication and IAS.

1. Opening of the meeting and welcome of participants by the Chair, Mr Pawel Wasowicz

The Chair, Mr Pawel Wasowicz (Iceland), opened the meeting, welcomed the participants and wished the Group a fruitful meeting.

2. Introduction by the Secretariat: technical information, meeting objectives and expected results

Ms Nadia Saporito, Junior Project Officer of the Bern Convention Secretariat, introduced herself and the new Secretary of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention), Ms. Ursula Sticker.

After presenting information on the practicalities of the online meeting, Ms Saporito gave a brief overview of milestones of the work of the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species (IAS) over the past 30 years.

The last meeting of the Group of Experts was held in Batoumi in 2019, kindly hosted by Georgian authorities. During that meeting, three studies had been discussed, namely the draft study on alien pathogens and wildlife in Europe, the draft guidance on e-commerce and IAS and the draft guidance on communication and IAS. The Group had welcomed the preparation of the documents and had suggested to further develop the documents for the next Group of Experts meeting.

The objective of this year's meeting was to take stock of the progress achieved since the last meeting of 2019 and, in particular:

- discuss and, if appropriate, agree on a guidance document on IAS and e-commerce for presentation and possible adoption by the Standing Committee at its upcoming 41st meeting;
- discuss the integration of the comments received from Contracting Parties on the draft study on alien pathogens and wildlife in Europe and on the draft guidance document on communication and IAS, and agree on next steps for the finalisation of the two drafts;
- review previous Recommendations adopted by the Standing Committee in relation to IAS, discuss the necessity for a follow-up and, if required, agree on the possible modalities;
- identify new areas of focus for the future work of the Group of Experts.

3. Adoption of the agenda

The meeting agenda was adopted with no amendments.

4. Draft study on alien pathogens and wildlife in Europe

Mr Riccardo Scalera, consultant to the Bern Convention, presented his draft study on alien pathogens and wildlife in Europe, recalling its key objective, and the main comments received from Contracting Parties after the meeting in Batoumi. A [discussion paper](#), prepared by the Secretariat for this year's meeting, collated all comments and suggestions flagged by Contracting Parties, classifying them into three categories:

- green: accepted edits;
- yellow: pending edits to be discussed with the Group of Experts;
- red: edits which are recommended not to be accepted as they would go beyond the intended scope of the study or for other reasons.

The Group of Experts welcomed the draft study, stressing that the lack of coordination among different authorities and poor understanding of the risks of alien pathogens on wildlife is posing a significant threat to biodiversity. The timely publication of the study could inform the discussion, currently on-going within the Interagency Liaison Group on IAS of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on the cooperation between biodiversity authorities and animal health authorities.

The Group of Experts discussed the main revisions needed before submitting the study to the Standing Committee for discussion and possible adoption.

One of the issues raised in the comments to the draft study concerned the chapter on the policy and legislation framework. Mr. Scalera noted that legislation in relation to IAS was very dynamic and that updating relevant legislation mentioned in the draft study would require extensive time and resources, with the risk that the study would become out-dated shortly after its publication. However, it was noted by the Group that one of the possible policy and legislative recommendations identified by the consultant in the draft study was the promotion of a comprehensive study on the current policy and legislation relevant to all Bern Convention Contracting Parties. To address this recommendation, and taking into consideration that the draft study mainly focuses on EU legislation, it was suggested to complement the study with an annex on relevant legislation of Bern non-EU Contracting Parties.

Furthermore, some comments to the draft study suggested to clarify the terminology and provide a glossary with definitions for key terms to ensure consistency throughout the document, where possible, using definitions used by the CBD, IPBES and IPPC. To further clarify the use of different terminology based on official definitions used by various treaties or laws cited throughout the study, it was agreed that Mr Scalera should also revise the document to ensure citations are highlighted in Italic.

Following the suggestions raised in the comments to the draft study to mention the risks of IAS contributing to the chain of events that may lead to zoonosis and threats to human health, Mr Scalera suggested adding an explicit statement in chapter 3, clarifying that zoonosis are not covered by this document.

The revised draft study and its annex would be discussed by the Group of Experts, either through written consultation or in an online meeting, prior to a possible presentation to and adoption by the Standing Committee.

Finally, the Group of Expert expressed its full support to one of the possible policy and legislative recommendations identified by the consultant in the draft study to '*allow biological invasion experts to liaise more closely to animal and plant health experts [...]to capitalise on experience from both fields*'. It was suggested to organise a workshop in order to assess actual and potential threats linked to the gaps in knowledge, policy and legislation and share examples of good practices and lesson learned in Contracting Parties. A first step could be to organise a joint meeting with the Bern Convention Groups of Experts on IAS, the conservation of bird and amphibians and reptiles.

5. Development of new voluntary tools

The Secretariat recalled that after the first draft of the guidance on communication and IAS and of the guidance on e-commerce and IAS had been presented in Batumi in 2019, the two draft documents were expected to be finalised in light of the comments received from Contracting Parties and Observers. However, due to delays resulting from the Covid-19 outbreak, the discussion and possible adoption of the documents had been postponed to 2021 to give consultation time to Contracting Parties and the Group of Experts on IAS, as well as to enhance the draft studies with pandemic-related content, where necessary, as recommended by the Standing Committee at its 40th meeting.

5.1 Draft Guidance on communication and IAS

The Secretariat recalled the main comments received from Contracting Parties to improve the draft guidance on communication and IAS:

- clarify the target group(s) of the guidance document;
- study and showcase examples of good practices on communication on IAS;
- give concrete tips and put more emphasis on how to develop and maintain fruitful working relations with sectors which are identified as pathways for the introduction of the IAS species.

In addition, to address the suggestion of the Standing Committee to complement the study with pandemic-related content, it was suggested to add a new section to the document to focus on challenges and opportunities of online communication.

Since a 2nd, revised draft of the guidance document could not be delivered by the initial consultant engaged in 2019, the Group of Experts discussed on how to proceed with further elaborating the guidance document. The Group concurred that the document was not yet ready to be presented for discussion and possible adoption by the Standing Committee. Rather, additional suggestions for improvement were identified:

- to focus more on communication examples specific to IAS;
- to simplify the language of some sections which are more technical, theoretical (e.g. ‘why we should talk to ‘large public’’).

The Group of Experts exchanged ideas on possible candidates who could take over the consultancy and asked for a two weeks period to give further suggestions to the Secretariat.

5.2 Draft Guidance e-commerce and IAS

The Secretariat informed the Group of Experts that Mr Andrea Monaco, consultant to the Bern Convention, was absent with apologies, but had prepared a recorded presentation for the agenda item to be shared during the meeting.

In his recorded speech, Mr Monaco presented the third draft of the guidance document on e-commerce and IAS. He first recalled the relevance of e-commerce as a pathway for the introduction of IAS, in particular during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. He then briefed the Group of Experts of the revisions made to address the main comments received after the meeting in Batumi of 2019.

The Group of Experts welcomed the document and stressed that only minor edits were necessary in order for it to be submitted to the Standing Committee. Particularly, Experts noted that Guiding Principle n.2 was rather EU-centric and suggested that it referred more generally to legally binding lists of regulated species. Furthermore, it was suggested that the guidance should highlight more the importance of international cooperation and coordination among Contracting Parties, to improve the effectiveness of controls as well as to raise awareness for relevant legislation among key stakeholders involved in e-commerce.

Once the document would be finalised, the Group of Experts suggested to submit it as an information document to the next meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) to the CBD, scheduled for January 2022 in Switzerland.

6. Follow up of Recommendations adopted by the Standing Committee in relation to IAS

Ms. Sabrina Dietz, Wildlife Policy Officer at the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE), gave a brief presentation on the role of hunters in the management of IAS. Ms. Dietz introduced FACE and recalled the European code of conduct on hunting and IAS, adopted by the Standing Committee at its 33rd meeting in December 2013. She recalled the first implementation report on the code of conduct on hunting and IAS drafted in collaboration with IAF and presented by FACE at the 37th Standing Committee meeting. Finally, she informed the Group of Experts of the on-going work in collaboration with IAF to finalise the second implementation report, which would focus on innovative and new solutions of hunters in combatting IAS.

The Group of Experts thanked Ms. Dietz for her interesting presentation and suggested that the second implementation report is presented at the 41st Standing Committee as an information document, should the tight meeting agenda permit.

IAF noted that falconry is an example of successful and effective implementation of guiding principles by voluntary tools and self-regulation.

Given the interesting report produced by FACE and IAF in previous years, the Group of Experts suggested to give Observers and independent experts the opportunity to report during meetings of the Group on the implementation of previous Recommendations adopted by the Standing Committee in relation to IAS.

With regard to the follow up on the European Strategy on IAS, while in previous meetings Contracting Parties submitted written updates, the Group suggested that going forward, oral updates will suffice.

More generally, it was proposed to translate some of the existing code of conducts into Russian, to facilitate a wider implementation in some Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention where practitioners are more familiar with Russian rather than English. IAF noted they might be able to support with some translations.

7. Proposals to the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention: work ahead

The Group recommended that the Bern Convention continues to work on IAS, especially on the following issues:

- IAS in marine environment;
- use of IAS as nature-based solutions to mitigate climate change. On this issue, it was suggested to establish a small working group to draft a brief evidence-based document ahead of the UNFCCC COP;
- the economic and human costs associated with IAS;
- raise awareness of the code of conducts adopted by the Bern Convention, in cooperation with animal health stakeholders and ministries of agriculture and wild animals.

Finally, the Group recalled the idea to organise a workshop on pathogens and a joint meeting with experts on reptiles and amphibians. Further, it was suggested to organise another workshop to exchange experience with e-commerce and IAS, to further strengthen collaboration between EU and non-EU countries on this important issue.

8. Next meeting of the Group of Experts on IAS

The Chair reminded the Group of Experts that his term of office would end after the next meeting in 2023, which Iceland tentatively offered to host.

To improve the information flow between meetings, it was suggested to organise smaller working meetings in-between the bi-annual meetings. Further, the Secretariat offered to share the email addresses of the meeting participants, pending their consent, to allow for a more direct communication among members of the Group.

9. Any other business

No other business was raised.

10. Closure of the meeting

The Chair thanked the members of the Group of Experts for the productive meeting, expressed his hope for an in-person meeting in 2023, and declared the meeting closed.

Appendix - List of Participants

Contracting Parties	
Armenia	<p>Ms Hasmik GHALACHYAN Chief specialist of the State Cadastres Maintenance of Registers and Monitoring Division of the Licenses, Permits and Compliances Department Ministry of Environment</p>
Belgium	<p>Mr Nicolas PARDON General policy Expert invasive alien species Agency for nature & forestry, Flemish Government</p>
Croatia	<p>Ms Petra KUTLEŠA Head of the Department for Alien Species Institute for Environment and Nature Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development</p>
Czech Republic	<p>Ms Jana PĚKNICOVÁ Ministry of the Environment</p> <p>Mr Jan PLESNIK Nature Conservation Agency</p>
Estonia	<p>Ms Merike LINNAMÄGI Senior Officer Nature Conservation Department Ministry of the Environment</p>
Finland	<p>Ms Johanna NIEMIVUO-LAHTI Department of the Natural Environment Ministry of the Environment</p>
France	<p>M. Charles-Henri DE BARSAC Chargé de mission "accords internationaux et européens faune sauvage" sous-direction de la protection et de la restauration des écosystèmes terrestres Ministère de la Transition Ecologique et Solidaire</p> <p>Mme Sabine ROSCHER Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle Centre thématique européen sur la Diversité biologique</p>
Georgia	<p>Ms Salome NOZADZE Biodiversity and Forestry Department Biodiversity Division Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture</p>
Germany	<p>Mr Philipp BÖHNING Trier University</p>
Iceland	<p>Mr Pawel WASOWICZ (Chair) Icelandic Institute of Natural History</p>

Malta	Mr Marko FILIPOVIC Environment Protection Officer Environment and Resources Authority
Republic of Moldova	Ms Veronica JOSU Principal advisory officer Department on Biodiversity Policy Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment Ms Angela LOZAN Manager biodiversity office Environmental Projects Implementation Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment
Norway	Mr Esten Odegaard Norwegian Environment Agency Water Resources and Knowledge Department
Poland	Ms Malgorzata KORCZAK Ms Ewa PISARCZYK General Directorate for Environmental Protection Department of Nature Conservation
Portugal	Mr Paulo CARMO Head of Regulatory Enforcement Division Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests Department of Nature Conservation and Biodiversity
Serbia	Ms Aleksandra ZATEZALO Institute for Nature Conservation
Slovenia	Dr. Branka TAVZES Nature Conservation Division Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning
Spain	Mr Felipe MORCILLO ALONSO University Complutense of Madrid Department of Biodiversity, Ecology and Evolution
Sweden	Ms Melanie JOSEFSSON Senior technical advisor Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, EU-Section
Turkey	Mr Irfan UYSAL MARIAS (Marine Invasive Alien Species) GEF VI Project Coordinator (mariasturk.org) TERIAS (Terrestrial & Inland Waters Invasive Alien Species) EU IPA II Project Manager (teriasturk.org) Head of Marine Protected Areas Division Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry General Directorate of Nature Conservation & National Parks
United Kingdom	Ms Sarah WEBSTER Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

European Union	<p>Mr Spyros FLEVARIS</p> <p>Mr Leonardo MAZZA</p> <p>Ms Iva OBRETENOVA</p> <p>Policy Officers European Commission - DG Environment</p>
Observers	
<p>EPPO European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization</p>	<p>Mr Rob TANNER</p>
<p>FACE European Federation for Hunting and Conservation</p>	<p>Ms Sabrina DIETZ Wildlife Policy Officer Belgium</p>
<p>IAF International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey</p>	<p>Mr Julian MÜHLE IAF Education Director</p> <p>Mr Gary TIMBRELL IAF CEO, Belgium</p> <p>Mr Matthew GAGE</p>
Consultant	
	<p>Mr Riccardo SCALERA Italy</p>
Council of Europe	
	<p>Ms Ursula STICKER Secretary of the Bern Convention</p> <p>Ms Nadia SAPORITO Junior Project Officer of the Bern Convention</p>