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T-PVS(2019)15

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

39th meeting
Strasbourg, 3-6 December 2019

Meeting of the Bureau

Strasbourg, 9-10 September 2019

- MEETING REPORT -

*Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Participation*

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

[\[T-PVS\(2019\)4E - Report of the 1st annual meeting of the Bureau, 18-19 March 2019\]](#)
[\[T-PVS\(2018\)17E Draft Report of the 38th Standing Committee meeting\]](#)
[\[T-PVS\(2018\)Misc - List of decisions and adopted texts at the 38th Standing Committee\]](#)

The Chair of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, Ms Jana Durkošová, opened the second annual meeting of the Bureau to the Bern Convention for 2019. She thanked the Secretariat for the hard work on preparing the meeting and ongoing activities as foreseen in the Programme of Activities. She further thanked all Bureau members for being present at the meeting and wished them a productive 2-day meeting.

The meeting agenda was adopted with no amendments (appendix 1).

2. 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BERN CONVENTION

The Secretariat welcomed the Bureau members and wished them a productive meeting. It was reminded that the Convention had been signed on 19th September 1979, so the coming 19th September would be the start of the 40th Anniversary Campaign which will include the following:

- A dedicated webpage had been created describing 40 success stories of the Convention;
- Social media coverage of the Campaign through regular posts to present the 40 stories available on the dedicated webpage;
- A press release and news on the main website of the Council of Europe would be published to increase reach out of the campaign;
- A small leaflet presenting the Convention and its past achievements will also be produced and is almost finalised. It will be the only material which will be printed and disseminated at the occasion of the 39th Standing Committee meeting;
- Three electronic newsletters recounting success stories would be also sent out to the Convention Network between 19th September and the Standing Committee meeting in December;
- A small reception will be held during the 39th Committee meeting and offered by the Finnish Presidency of the EU. It will most probably take place on the Wednesday evening, 4 December. Past Chairs and Secretariat members would be invited, as well as the Finnish Ambassador, and possibly the Georgian Ambassador- it being the Chairmanship of Georgia of the Committee of Ministers;
- It was also planned on this occasion to sign the Biodiversity Charter of Strasbourg, with the possible presence of the Secretary General or Deputy Secretary General, as well as other dignitaries from the Council of Europe, the Strasbourg Eurométropole, and other organisations which signed the Charter. A ceremonial tree planting was also being considered;
- Several exhibitions and visibility materials were also being planned, including posters of EDPA sites, photos of past and active members, a roll-up, an information leaflet, and the diffusion of old publications such as the Naturopa magazine.

A discussion followed where it was suggested to scan and make the old publications electronic. The idea of translating the leaflet into different languages of member states was also mentioned. It was also suggested not to print too many materials but to have them diffused online. The Chair of the Standing Committee reminded that Slovakia would celebrate its 100th anniversary of the Nature conservation agency in October, and they had planted 100 trees in celebration.

Decision: The Bureau thanked the Secretariat for the excellent work on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Convention and welcomed and approved all planned activities in the framework of the Campaign.

The Bureau warmly thanked the Finnish Presidency of the EU and the Finnish Embassy before the Council of Europe for their generosity in organising the reception to mark the 40th anniversary at the margins of the Standing Committee meeting.

3. FINANCING AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE BERN CONVENTION

The Secretariat stressed the sensitivity of the issue on finance and reminded that the Bern Convention had had much more human and operational resources in the past, 25 staff at one moment.

It reminded that over the last 25 years, the trend was going down and it seemed unlikely to change. In 2017, there was a financial crisis at the Council of Europe, due to the non-payment by the Russian Federation of its contribution to the organisation budget. After talks, the Russian Federation finally paid the 2019 contribution in the summer, and reports say they would pay the 2017 and 2018 contributions soon. Although the panned contingency plan for the organisation was abandoned, the situation has shown the fragility of the Council of Europe and its strong dependence on major contributors' payments. The Secretariat also reminded that there had been zero nominal growth for several years at the Council of Europe and that this might also be the case for the organisation's budget 2020-2021. This will again have an impact on the Convention's budget.

The Secretariat further informed on changes in the staff of the Convention, as one of its two assistants is on long-term sick leave since end May 2019 and the other on maternity leave since June 2019. The latter was replaced on 15 July and the former will be replaced as from 15 September, leaving the Secretariat with only two staff members for 2 months. In addition, the current Secretary of the Convention will be leaving the Convention and the Council of Europe after the 39th Standing Committee.

The Secretariat resumed that given the current staff and budget situation, it is of the opinion that the discussions on options on how to sustain the Convention's budget in the future had to be pursued and even enlarged, even if the contingency plan linked to the non-payment by the Russian Federation was abandoned. It also reported that members of the Working Group on Finances also share this opinion.

Some Bureau members informed about raising the issue of the Convention's financing within the European Union's internal meetings. Some Contracting Parties were unaware of the system of voluntary contributions and this means lack of communication between the Secretariat, the focal points, and the national governments that needs to be tackled.

Decision: The Bureau expressed its growing worries concerning what more cuts would mean for the Convention's sustainability and future. It urged Contracting Parties to attend the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee with a clear mandate on the point of the agenda dealing with the financial issues of the Convention.

3.1 Inter-sessional working group on financing: progress

*[T-PVS(2019)1rev – Financing the Bern Convention: options and legal and feasibility aspects]
[T-PVS(2019)5 – Draft Resolution on the financing of the Bern Convention]*

The Secretariat explained that following the mandate given to the inter-sessional working group on financing, a document was produced [T-PVS(2019)1rev], clarifying the 3 main options for setting-up a mechanism for compulsory financial contributions from Parties. The document clarifies the risks and benefits linked to each mechanism: 1) Amendment to the Articles of the Convention, 2) Additional Protocol or 2) Partial agreement. The other document produced by the Group is document [T-PVS(2019)5] - a proposal for a resolution to bring a short-term response to the financial issues facing the Convention. It includes a scale of voluntary contributions which should apply from next year. The resolution invites Parties to accept this scale and to use it as an indicative scale for a minimum contribution which can be topped up.

The Bureau discussed the proposals and stressed that it was important to give Parties more time to consider the legal options and form their positions. It was mentioned that the implementation of any of the two options would be a new situation for the Committee of Ministers which has to approve the option too and there was the risk of it being rejected outright, as this could possibly lead to a domino effect for other Conventions.

Concerning the draft Resolutions, the Bureau considered that the scale proposed by the Working group might need to be raised and stressed that countries should be clearly informed that the contribution proposed in the scale is indicative, and that it should not lead to a reduction of certain countries payments.

Decision: The Bureau urged Contracting Parties to attend the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee with a clear mandate on the new scale of voluntary contributions through the draft Resolution and on the three longer-term financial options described, in order to choose the most appropriate of these options and to mandate the Secretariat to work towards its implementation.

3.2 Contribution by the Bern Convention to the current and future post-2020 global biodiversity framework: progress

[T-PVS(2019)9 – Draft Resolution on a vision for the Bern Convention in the decade 2020-2030]

The Secretariat informed that it is planning to prepare a short document presenting the contribution of the Convention to the current world biodiversity framework and to each of the Aichi Targets. This document should be finalised for the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee in both English and French. It will eventually be submitted as an information document for the upcoming 23rd CBD SBSTTA meeting, taking place on 25 - 29 November 2019 in Montreal.

In addition, the Secretariat reminded that as per its mandate, the inter-sessional Working Group on Financing was also expected to articulate a vision for the future of the Bern Convention and its role amongst other MEAs, explaining the unique value that the Convention adds and can develop in the future. The Secretariat prepared a Draft Resolution on a vision for the Bern Convention in the decade 2020-2030 [T-PVS(2019)9] which was circulated among the members of the Working Group. The Secretariat took as an example [Resolution No. 7 from 2000 of the Standing Committee, on the medium-term strategic development of the Convention on the Conservation of European wildlife and Natural Habitats](#). Some of the members of the Group expressed an opinion that a resolution might not be the most appropriate format and wished more time was devoted to this task, if available, including through on-line meetings of the Group.

Decision: The Bureau welcomed the idea of the development of an information document which can stress the contribution of the Convention to the achievement of the Aichi Targets. It advised that this document is kept short, graphic and addressed to decision-makers and confirmed that it is very useful that it is sent as information document for the SBSTTA meeting.

It also noted that some members of the Working Group on finances were not convinced of the utility to develop a new Resolution on the role and vision for the Bern Convention for the post-2020 period, but agreed that the document should remain a draft Resolution and should be submitted, after some amendments it proposed, as a working document for the Standing Committee. It noted that the vision for the Convention will be further developed in 2020 and 2021, once the global framework for biodiversity is set at the CBD level and a full Strategic Plan for the Convention for the next decade is negotiated. It suggested that a working group is formed, to support the development of such a Strategic Plan, which helps the Secretariat with this.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES AND BUDGET FOR 2019

[T-PVS/Inf(2019)6 – Calendar of meetings in 2019]

[T-PVS(2018)16 - Programme of Activities and budget for 2019]

4.1 European Diploma for Protected Areas: result of the CoE CM meeting in July 2019 and progress in appraisal visits in 2019

[T-PVS/DE(2019)13 – Report of the meeting of the Group of Specialists on the EDPA]

[T-PVS/DE(2019)17 Draft Resolutions on the renewal of the Diploma to Desertas Nature Reserve (Portugal) and the Cretan White Mountains National Park, Samaria (Greece)]

The Secretariat presented the outcomes of the annual meeting of the Group of Specialists on the EDPA and informed that 15 out of 17 planned visits had taken place by 31 August, two of which concerned renewals which should be done in 2019 [Document T-PVS/DE(2019)17]. One of the visits concerned a new application for the Diploma by the Parco Regionale Gallipoli Cognato in Italy and the first feedback from the visit is very positive. The detailed results of the on-the-spot appraisal for this new application will be discussed in 2020 by the Group of Specialists. The Secretariat also

reminded that the list of areas with pending renewals in 2020 and 2021 is available in the report of the meeting of the Group of Specialists [T-PVS/DE(2019)13].

In July, the Committee of Ministers adopted seven Resolutions for the renewal of the EDPA. However, the formulation of two conditions for the renewal of the EDPA to the Dutch site De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve had been contested by the country authorities through their Permanent Representation. As advised by the Secretariat, the file had been sent back to the Group of Specialist for further discussion and advice, at their meeting in 2020. An ultimatum had also been sent to the French authorities regarding the lack of information and reporting from the Corsican site Scandola Natural Reserve. The matter might need to be debated at the upcoming Standing Committee meeting in December 2019 if no progress is achieved.

The Secretariat also informed about its contacts with the World Heritage Centre, in view of increasing cooperation on areas of joint interest. Regular communication and contacts will be ensured with them in the future.

The Secretariat reminded that three members of the Group of Specialists will leave the Group of Specialists at the end of 2019 - the experts from Hungary, Sweden and Italy. Considering the rotation principle, the United Kingdom, Spain and Greece were the countries chosen by the Bureau for filling up the vacant positions. However, so far only Greece had accepted and the Secretariat is trying to follow-up with the two other counties.

Eventually, two very positive developments were communicated to the Bureau. An exhibition would be launched at the margins of the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee to mark the 40th anniversary of the Convention, presenting a certain number of EDPA areas. A new slogan had been democratically chosen for the occasion, with the help of the EDPA area's managers and EDPA experts. Last but not least all EDPA areas will appear on the WCMC Protected Planet website.

Decision: The Bureau thanked the outgoing experts sitting in the Group of Specialists of the EDPA for their hard work and dedication. It welcomed the positive development of the inclusion of the EDPA mechanisms and areas in the Protected Planet website.

It agreed that the disputed renewal conditions concerning the Dutch site De Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve should be considered very carefully by the Group of Specialists. It advised that communication to the focal points on the EDPA renewals should improve and instructed the Secretariat to send the Group of Specialists' meeting reports to all focal points to help avoid such situations.

The Bureau also approved document TPVS/DE(2019)17 - Draft Resolutions on the renewal of the Diploma to Desertas Nature Reserve (Portugal) and the Cretan White Mountains National Park, Samaria (Greece)" and instructed the Secretariat to send it to the CM for formal adoption.

4.2 Invasive Alien Species: results of the 13th meeting of the Group of Experts

[T-PVS(2019)9 – Report of the meeting of the Group of Experts]

[T-PVS/Inf(2019)2 – Draft Guidance on e-commerce and IAS]

[T-PVS/Inf(2019)17 – Draft Guidance on communication and IAS]

[T-PVS(2019)6 – Draft Recommendation on pollinators and IAS]

The Secretariat reported on the results of Group of Expert's meeting which had taken place in Batumi on 24-25 June. For the purposes of the meeting the Secretariat produced a compilation of national reports on progress in the implementation of the European IAS Strategy [T-PVS/Inf\(2019\)11](#) and an analysis of these reports [T-PVS/Inf\(2019\)16](#). The meeting was a great opportunity for exchange of good practices and brainstorming around shared issues and concerns.

The meeting also discussed the new voluntary tools currently under development, the Draft Guidance on e-commerce and IAS and the Draft Guidance on communication and IAS. The Group concluded that both documents need further elaboration and provided the consultants and Secretariat with ideas on the further work necessary for their achievement. The first draft of the Study on study on alien pathogens and wildlife in Europe was also presented by the consultant working on the file and was welcomed as a timely and useful endeavour. The Group again provided the author with comments and suggestions for the finalisation of the study. It was agreed that an additional circulation will be done after the meeting, with the aim of a wider circulation of the study among Parties of the Convention and relevant Groups of Experts, in particular the Amphibians and Reptiles one.

Decision: The Bureau appreciated the results of the meeting and warmly thanked the hosting country, Georgia, for the excellent organisation of the meeting and particularly interesting field trip.

It discussed the outcomes of the meeting and requested that whenever possible, the draft Guidance or Study is presented at the 39th Standing committee meeting. It was agreed that this presentation will be for information and a formal adoption of the Guidance tools might only intervene in 2020.

4.3 Illegal killing of birds: results of the joint Bern SFPs Network/CMS MIKT meeting

[\[T-PVS\(2019\)8 – Report of the Joint Bern/CMS IKB meeting\]](#)

[\[T-PVS\(2019\)XX – Draft Recommendation on the Rome Strategic Plan on IKB\]](#)

[\[T-PVS\(2019\)03rev – Draft Rome Strategic Plan on IKB\]](#)

The Secretariat reported on the outcomes of the Joint Bern/CMS meeting which took place in Rome on 8-10 May. The meeting discussed the results of the first assessment of the Scoreboard to assess the progress in Combating Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Wild Birds. The response rate and the responses themselves to the first round were encouraging, but it was noted that no country from North Africa had supplied information. Some countries had provided full responses and others only partial ones. Stakeholders had been invited to respond as well and in some cases the respondents were NGOs. The Secretariat again reminded that the results of the first assessment in 2018 would serve as the baseline for later comparison. The meeting agreed that other Scoreboard reports, which were promised but were not yet submitted would be accepted in the coming months. Several questions were also raised by Parties regarding the method of scoring and they pointed possible discrepancies on the way parties replied to some of the indicators' questions.

A long discussion, including in working groups, was also dedicated to planning the IKB priorities for both Bern and the CMS beyond 2020. The final outcome of the meeting was a draft Rome Strategic Plan on IKB, for the period 2020 – 2030. The strategic document was circulated for the first consultation after the meeting and is currently in second consultation among Parties to Bern and members of the CMS MIKT taskforce. It is expected that the paper is submitted to the Standing Committee for adoption at the end of the year at its 39th meeting and later, in February 2020, to the CMS COP for endorsement.

Decision: The Bureau warmly thanked the organisers of the meeting, the Italian authorities, for an excellent hosting. It further acknowledged the close collaboration among the CMS and Bern Convention Secretariats.

It further appreciated the results of the meeting and looked forward to receiving comments from Parties on the second consultation and the submission of the final draft version of the Rome Strategic Plan on IKB to the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee, for examination and possible adoption.

4.4 Conservation of birds: state of play of the draft Programme of Work

The Secretariat explained the preparation of a Programme of Work of the Convention on the conservation of birds was a request from the last Group of Experts meeting in Malta two years ago. However, the Secretariat did not have the time or resources to work on this issue for the time being as more urgent issues and current business were to be addressed.

Decision: The Bureau thanked the Secretariat and expressed its hopes that this issue could be picked up again at a later stage and a programme of work for the Group of Experts on the conservation of birds could be prepared.

4.5 Setting-up of the Emerald Network: state of play and remaining activities in 2019

a. Monitoring of the implementation of the Emerald Network

The Secretariat informed on the status of the development of the Emerald Network:

- Andorra had applied for the official adoption of two sites as Emerald sites. These sites cover a large part of their national territory;
- The good cooperation with the EEA was continuing and there had been two recent biogeographical seminars in Moldova and Ukraine. The next would take place in Budapest on 29-30 October on bird species, with the participation of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This meeting would herald the end of the 2nd cycle of the partnership in Eastern countries. In general, the quality of implementation in those countries had improved, with good cooperation between NGOs and governments in all countries.
- Armenia, whose Network was the most successful in terms of sufficiency and covering 35% of its territory had unofficially announced being in the process of requesting a drastically reduce its Network coverage down to 15% of national territory. The sites in Armenia are candidate Emerald sites and are not yet adopted.
- Finally, the progress of the Network calendar goals, although encouraging, is not going to allow for reaching its overall objective which is the a fully operational Emerald Network in 2020.

Decision: The Bureau congratulated Andorra for their decision to join the Emerald Network family. It expressed its deep concern over Armenia's plans to implement such a decrease in coverage. It agreed that clear information must be sent from Armenian authorities explaining this change of direction, using the relevant change reports, if they go ahead with their plans. A new analysis on the sufficiency of the Network, if decreased and if the decreased is accepted, should be done.

The Bureau also agreed that a strict warning should be sent to countries which do not meet their obligations and commitments in respect of the Emerald Network, stressing again that a lot of resources had been invested by the Bern Convention and the European Union in the setting-up of the Emerald Network and thus concrete results were expected. The Bureau specifically mentioned Iceland, as a country whose Emerald Network sites were pending imminent submission for more than 10 years.

It instructed the Secretariat to prepare and submit for discussion at the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks, a draft recommendation on progress in the Emerald Network aimed at reminding countries of their obligations. A highlight should also be made at the upcoming 39th Standing Committee meeting on progress in every country concerned according to their commitments in the Emerald Network Calendar 2020.

Eventually, the Bureau further instructed the Secretariat to set up a periodic review of country-specific Network sites and an online barometer on progress, which could lead to a yearly Recommendation from the Standing Committee. The Bureau instructed the secretariat to introduce a discussion at the Group of Experts in October on the setting-up of a periodic review of the Network, country by country, accompanied by technical and scientific advice.

b. Transfer of UK's Natura 2000 sites under the Emerald Network

The Secretariat reported on on-going meetings and discussions via teleconference with the UK authorities in charge (JNCC/DEFRA). It informed that a lot of work is required by the UK to transfer its sites to the Emerald Network, which should intervene after Brexit and is aimed at ensuring an international protection of the current N2000 sites in the country.

The Secretariat warned however, that due to the many overlapping sites in the UK, result of the double designation within the EU (Birds and habitats Directive), the transfer of the sites is a challenge for the Bern Convention, both in terms of financial and human resources. The challenge also concerns the Emerald Network online viewer. Cooperation with the UK authorities is however efficient, and they have expressed interest at becoming more active in the Network and related Expert Groups.

Decision: The Bureau acknowledged the outcomes of the meetings and ongoing work and thanked the Secretariat for its efforts.

c. Ecological Character of Emerald Network sites

The Secretariat reminded of the Guidance document on detecting and responding to changes in the ecological character of sites and explained the 15 guidelines and flowchart it has prepared for facilitating practical work with the document. There had so far been feedback only from Norway and the EU on the paper. Norway was cautious, as implementation would require a lot of resources for their 700 sites. The EU had reminded that the Natura 2000 approach is even stricter and more complex, for instance with the Appropriate assessment requirements. Accession countries would hence need to be warned on the difference in requirements. There had been a testing of the guidance by Ukraine, but with no clear information to date on the outcomes.

Decision: The Bureau noted the importance of the document and the relevant support it can provide in the assessment of files. It instructed the Secretariat to continue to follow-up case-files related to Emerald Network sites in line with the guidelines. It also instructed the Secretariat to submit the Guidelines and flowchart for consideration by the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks and for presentation for adoption by the Standing Committee at its 39th meeting.

d. Updating the lists of habitats and species targeted by the Emerald Network (listed respectively in Resolutions No. 4 (1996) and No. 6 (1998))

The Secretariat informed on the three documents, which would be discussed with the Group of Experts taking place on 2 October. It explained that as marine habitats were not considered extensively when the Resolutions on the Emerald network were adopted, there was a need to update the Resolution No. 4 (1996) and its lists to better represent these environments. Therefore, new marine habitats are proposed for inclusion in the Resolution No. 4 (1996), together with some alpine habitats. If agreed by the relevant Group of Experts, their adoption will be proposed at the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee meeting.

However, at the request of some parties, a control mechanism for further amendments (enlargement) of the lists of habitats and species targeted by the Emerald network was prepared and will be debated by the Group of Experts. The secretariat presented how the control mechanism works.

Decision: The Bureau took note of the three documents and the proposed new additions to the list of habitats in Resolution No. 4 (1996). It suggested changing the title of the control mechanism and agreed with it.

4.6 Reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) on conservation status of species and habitats: state of play

The Secretariat reminded that the deadline for the submission of country reports on the conservation status of species and habitats, so called Reporting under Resolution No. 8, is end December 2019. It further informed that a 3rd and last capacity building event, aimed at supporting countries in preparing their reports was held in Paris on May and that 10 Parties to the Convention attended.

Decision: The Bureau took note of the information provided by the Secretariat and urged all relevant Parties (non-EU members) to report by the deadline. They welcomed this reporting as the major endeavour by the Convention in the past year and acknowledged its potential to provide an overview of the conservation status of Species and habitats at pan-European level, when considered together with data from EU countries (Art. 17 and Art. 12 reporting under the Nature Directives).

4.7 Climate Change and Biodiversity and Protected Areas and Ecological Networks: state of preparation of the joint meeting of the Groups of Experts

The Secretariat described the upcoming meetings which would take place on 2-4 October in Trondheim and thanked the hosting country and contributors. It was hoped that the meetings would come up with some good recommendations related to protected areas and climate change, which would in turn be presented for adoption by the Standing Committee. The meeting was considered as the perfect occasion to define the roles of the Bern Convention and EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement and find synergies between them, as well as more broadly, to identify the added value the Council of Europe could bring on the most pressing issue of our times.

Decision: The Bureau thanked the Secretariat for the preparations of what shapes as a very interesting event. It agreed that this was an important event. It advised the meeting to address the misunderstanding between adaptation measure and adaptive management, but also nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based adaptation.

The Bureau advised that the key issue of the “portfolio effect” or interaction among species and how to manage the most possible species in the face climate change. It warned that this is difficult as there is not enough data linking biodiversity management and ecosystem functioning. The Bureau considered that these are issues on which the Bern Convention holds an important added value, being a Convention about species and habitats.

4.8 Conservation of amphibian and reptile species: state of affairs

[T-PVS/Inf(2019)18 – Draft Report on alien pathogens and pathogens spread by invasive alien species in Europe]

The Secretariat reminded that the development of this study was a request from both the Group of Experts on Amphibians and Reptiles and the one on IAS, as there is an agreement that pathogens are by far the most important aliens and pose a threat for both wildlife and humans and that a key problem is the important knowledge gap on wildlife pathogens in general and the misunderstandings on what is alien and what endemic, how to deal with species becoming vectors, how reintroduced animals are screened, etc.

The study was finalised and is circulating for comments until the end of the month of September. It could be presented to Parties at the upcoming Standing Committee meeting and most probably, could be debated further at next year’s meeting of the Group of Experts on amphibians and reptiles, depending on the programme of activities.

Decision: The Bureau took note of the progress in the development of the study and welcomed it. It urged Parties to respond and contribute to the paper and advised that, if possible, the study is presented before the Committee.

4.9 European Conference for the conservation of the lynx in West and Central Europe: results of the event

*[T-PVS(2019)7 – Report of the Conference on the conservation of the Lynx]
[T-PVS(2019)XX – Draft Recommendation on the conservation of the Lynx in Central and West Europe]*

The Secretariat reported that the event taking place in Bonn (Germany) on 17-19 June 2019 aimed specifically at experts and seeking ways to ensure coordination among the various projects and initiatives for the conservation of the lynx in Central and West Europe. The meeting came up with science-based recommendations, whose implementation depends on the approval through the range country authorities. This is the reason why a draft Recommendation, stemming from the conclusions from the event, will be submitted for discussion and formal adoption by the Bern Convention Standing Committee.

Decision: The Bureau acknowledged the usefulness of the meeting and welcomed the presentation of a draft Recommendation on the issue to the Committee. It requested to receive the report and draft recommendation electronically before it would be posted on the webpage of the Standing Committee meeting.

4.10 Review of the European Plant Conservation Strategy: progress

The Secretariat reported on the progress in its discussions with Planta Europa and hoped that the small financial support for the review of the Strategy could be done in 2019 and then additionally in 2020. The actual work on the review of the implementation of the Strategy is going to be done in collaboration with Plant Life (UK).

Decision: The Bureau took note of the plans to support the development of a review of the European Plant Conservation Strategy and supported this initiative.

4.11 Old Growth Forest Protection Strategy: results of a meeting with Wild Europe

The Secretariat informed that it has held an informal discussion with the Wild Europe representatives at the IUCN regional conservation forum, which took place in Rotterdam, in June. The colleagues from Wild Europe promised to submit a revised version of the Strategy, which would fit better the convention's standards and formats for such policy documents, in view of a possible consideration by the Bureau of the opportunity to support the document for adoption by parties through the Standing Committee.

The Secretariat also informed that the Convention will be represented at an event organised by the Assembly of European Regions, in Slovenia, at the initiative of a Polish member of Parliament. Mr Peter Skoberne, member of the Bureau, kindly accepted to represent the Convention at the event and to present the Convention's work on old growth forests, including through the EDPA mechanism.

Decision: The Bureau took note of the informal meeting and stressed again that due to the lack of resources of the Secretariat and the many priorities the Convention already works on, further support to Wild Europe's own initiative on Old Growth Forests can be envisaged at a later stage only.

5. MONITORING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LEGAL ASPECTS OF THE CONVENTION

5.1 Biennial reporting request and submissions

The Secretariat informed that a reporting request on exceptions made (biennial reporting) will be sent to all Parties, for the periods 2015-2016 and 2017-2018, further to the creation of the relevant questionnaires in the Bern Convention's ORS.

5.2 ORS and EU Member States obligations

Regarding the reporting by EU countries Parties to the Convention, the Secretariat reminded on the agreement of the Committee to allow them to report only once for both the Convention and the EU Nature Directives derogations, using the Habides + tool. The Secretariat clarified the small remaining issues linked to the compatibility of the two tools in a teleconference with the colleagues from DG

Environment in charge of reporting. A joint note by the Secretariat and DG Environment will provide additional instructions to EU member states parties to the Convention on the practical submission of reports.

The Bureau discussed the continuous difficulties Parties encounter in submitting their reports in the ORS and the lack of time at the Secretariat to cope with these issues in a proper way. The possibility for requesting the use of the Habides + tool by all Contracting Parties was discussed. However, the use of the Habides + tool by all Parties might require adjustments on both Bern Convention Article 9 reporting requirements and the tool itself, for instance regarding the periodicity of reporting.

Decision: The Bureau thanked the Secretariat for their efforts despite the technical problems with the ORS and urged Parties to submit their reports.

The Bureau mandated the Secretariat to liaise with DG Environment and the EEA to further discuss the possible use by all Parties of the Convention of the Habides + tool and to inform the Standing Committee on the outcomes of this discussion. It agreed that a more detailed discussion on the issue can take place at the meeting of the Standing Committee in 2020.

6. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION: CASE-FILES

[T-PVS/Notes(2019)1 – Summary of open and possible case files]

[T-PVS/Notes(2019)2 – Summary of other complaints]

[T-PVS/Notes(2019)3 – Summary of complaints on stand-by]

[T-PVS/Inf(2019)5 – Register of Bern Convention's case-files]

6.1 Open files

- 1995/6: Cyprus: Akamas peninsula

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)42 - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)32 - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the complainant for the updated report on progress and regretted that the report from the authorities was received very late before the Bureau meeting.

The Bureau called for a better cooperation between different authorities and stakeholders at national level, as there are continuous opposing views on whether the Recommendation is implemented or not. It expressed serious concern that after so many years the Bern Convention recommendations are still not fully followed-up by the authorities and that according to interested actors the main threats remain. It urged the national authorities to attend the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee meeting and reminded that in long-lasting cases such as this one, the Standing Committee might consider adopting a decision which will effectively close the file while formulating a conclusion whether the country has implemented or not its obligations towards the Convention, or namely, implemented fully the recommended measures in Recommendation No. 191 (2016).

The Bureau further instructed the Secretariat to request that the European Commission sends an updated report on their own processes in relation to this file, for the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee.

Eventually, the Bureau also instructed the Secretariat to consider launching an information/awareness-raising campaign on marine turtles' conservation which could target travel agencies and tourists. The latest data on the drivers of biodiversity loss from the IPBES assessment report from May 2019 could be used.

- 2004/2: Bulgaria: Wind farms in Balchik and Kaliakra –Via Pontica

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)21 - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)33 - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau noted the lack of reports by authorities and the late submission of an updated report by the complainant.

The Bureau noted the continuous mistrust and lack of communication between the civil society community and authorities, which clearly hinders the successful and smooth implementation of Recommendation No. 2000 (2018), negotiated after an on-the-spot appraisal visit. The Bureau reminded that the Bern Convention case-file system is also about cooperation, allowing NGOs and private persons to be involved in the process and more importantly, to use the expertise and knowledge provided by NGOs.

The Bureau expressed its concern that it did not receive an updated report from the authorities and instructed the Secretariat to request them to submit one for the upcoming Standing Committee meeting and to clearly indicate how they are involving the NGOs in the Recommendation implementation process. The Bureau urged the national authorities and NGO to attend the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee.

Eventually, the Bureau instructed the Secretariat to request that the European Commission sends an updated report on their own processes in relation to this file, for the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee.

➤ 2010/5: Greece: threats to marine turtles in Thines Kiparissias

[T-PVS/Files(2019)XX - Government Report]

[T-PVS/Files(2019)36 - Complainant Report]

Decision: The Bureau thanked the complainant for the updated report and regretted the lack of reporting from the authorities, which might be interpreted as a lack of commitment.

The Bureau strongly regretted the incomplete implementation of the recommended actions through the Convention's Recommendation No.174 (2014) and urged the authorities to improve the management and law enforcement in the area.

The Bureau urged the national authorities of Greece to be present at the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee. It further instructed the Secretariat to request that the European Commission sends an updated report on their own processes in relation to this file, for the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee.

➤ 2012/9: Turkey: Presumed degradation of nesting beaches in Fethiye and Patara SPAs

[T-PVS/Files(2019)26 - Government Report]

[T-PVS/Files(2019)28 - Complainant Report]

Decision: The Bureau thanked the complainant for the updated and very detailed report after the recent nesting season but noted the lack of a report from the authorities on how they have implemented the planned activities for the 2019 summer period.

It regretted that besides its several requests for the submission of a detailed and time bound Action Plan on how the recommendations are going to be implemented, the authorities are yet to provide one. It warned that the national authorities of Turkey need to be more proactive and urged them to be present at the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee and to present the long awaited detailed, year by year Action Plan for the implementation of the Recommendations.

➤ 2013/1: North Macedonia: Hydro power development within the territory of Mavrovo National Park

[T-PVS/Files(2019)XX - Government Report]

[T-PVS/Files(2019)XX - Complainant Report]

Decision: The Bureau noted the lack of reports of both the authorities and the complainant. It further noted that the national authorities have contacted the Secretariat with a request for clarifications regarding the possible terms of reference of the expert advice mission which the Convention proposed. It instructed the Secretariat to respond to the authorities and to seek the organisation of the mission in

2020. It advised that the issue of the management and conservation of the Balkan Lynx is also included in the Terms of reference of the mission.

Eventually, it instructed the Secretariat to prepare the draft Terms of reference and submit these for discussion at the upcoming 39th meeting of the Standing Committee.

- 2016/5: Albania: Presumed negative impact of hydro-power plant development on the Vjosa river

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)25 - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)20 - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau noted the lack of updated reports by both the authorities and the complainant. It expressed particular regret at the lack of a reply by the authorities to the requests of the Bureau for the submission of a programme of work on the implementation of the Recommendation.

The Bureau urged the national authorities of Albania to be present at the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee and to provide an update on their concrete actions on each of the operational paragraphs of the Recommendation, as well as a concrete programme of work for their achievement.

6.2 Possible files

- 2001/4: Bulgaria: Motorway through the Kresna Gorge

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)22 - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)23 - NGO Report\]](#) + [Annex I](#) + [Annex II](#) + [Annex III](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the national authorities for the updated report and noted the late arrival of the report from the complainant.

It acknowledged the information received from the authorities but noted that it did not answer the question why roads are already being built through the Natura 2000 sites, what mitigation and compensation measures are planned and currently implemented due to these various building works, including the illegal ones. The Bureau warned that any construction works on sites of specific conservation value should be handled very carefully and should not deviate from the original planning for which impact assessments are being made.

Eventually, the Bureau instructed the Secretariat to request to the European Commission an updated report on their own processes in relation to file, the evaluation of the EIA/AA 2017 quality and comprehensiveness and the expected date for the decision on the application package for EU funding. The report should be made available for the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee.

- 2016/4: Montenegro: Development of a commercial project in Skadar Lake National Park and candidate Emerald site

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)27 - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)24 - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the complainant for the updated report but noted the lack of an update from the authorities.

It appreciated the authorities' monitoring work, presented in their report for the first annual meeting of the Bureau, but noted that there is a lack of information on the core of the Recommendation and on the situation and developments on the spot.

The Bureau urged the national authorities of Montenegro to be present at the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee and requested that both the authorities and the complainant send persuasive arguments on whether or not the Standing Committee should upgrade the case to an open file. The Bureau's suggestion will be for the opening of the file.

- 2017/01: Norway: Lack of legal protection for Northern goshawk and birds of prey

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)34 - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the authorities for the report but noted the lack of a report from the complainant.

The Bureau acknowledged the process is moving in the right direction at national level and agreed that the case will be left on the agenda for the Standing Committee for information, but it will only be discussed in 2020 as most probably, due to the lengthy processes at national level, nothing could be said or done before.

Eventually, the Bureau instructed the Secretariat to request to both the authorities and the complainant to submit short written updates for the Standing Committee, if relevant.

6.3 Complaints on stand-by

- 2011/5: Threats to the Rhone streber (*Zingel asper*) in the Doubs (France) and in the canton of Jura (Switzerland) and follow-up of Recommendation No. 169 (2013)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)46 - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the complainant for the detailed report and noted the lack of a report from the authorities of France or Switzerland.

The Bureau regretted that despite all efforts only one species has been observed in 2018 and shares the fears expressed by the complainant organisations. It reminds again to both the French and Swiss authorities that major gaps remain in the implementation of several of the operational points of the Recommendation No.163 (2013), in particular regarding the agricultural sector.

The Bureau looks forward to the organisation and results of the workshop and requests again an updated report from the authorities is provided for the second annual meeting of the Bureau in 2020 and requested to put the case on the agenda of the 2020 Standing Committee meeting for follow-up, in line with the agreement for a biannual Standing Committee follow-up.

- 2014/8: Greece: Presumed large-scale exploitation and marketing of protected marine shelled molluscs

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)35 - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the authorities for the report but noted the lack of a report from the complainant.

The Bureau acknowledged that the authorities are doing efforts to cope with the situation and warned that if the complainant organisations do not send an updated report, the file could be dismissed, as it would be assumed that there is no further problem.

The Bureau instructed the Secretariat to request a new report by the authorities for its 1st annual meeting in 2020, providing concrete statistics on cases of violation of the protected species legislation and the relevant authorities' action. It further requested an updated report from the complainant organisations on the situation on the spot.

- 2015/2: North Macedonia: Possible impact of wind-farm developments on bats

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau noted the lack of reports of both the authorities and the complainant.

The Bureau noted that in the frame of the Open case file 2013/1: North Macedonia: Hydro power development within the territory of Mavrovo National Park, an expert mission is going to take place in

2020. It requested the Secretariat to broaden the scope of the mission and to allow for the mission to also collect information from both the authorities and the Complainant and NGO community on this specific case.

- 2016/6: Serbia: Presumed risk of national extinction of great bustards (*Otis tarda*)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)7 - Government Report\]](#)
[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)11 - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the authorities for the report, but noted the lack of a report from the complainant.

The Bureau congratulated the authorities for the important progress and for the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding. It advised the national authorities of Serbia to reach out to the CMS Secretariat and to actively contribute to the Working Group under the MoU. It further asked the authorities to report again for the 1st annual Bureau meeting in September 2021 on progress.

The Bureau further suggested that the Group of Experts on the conservation of birds under the Convention could also take on the issue of the conservation of this iconic bird and discuss ways for improving its conservation status.

- 2017/2: North Macedonia: Alleged negative impacts to Lake Ohrid and Galichica National Park candidate Emerald Sites due to infrastructure developments

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX - Government Report\]](#)
[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)40 - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the complainant for the report. It noted that due to the lack of report from the authorities, it was difficult to discuss in a meaningful way.

It further noted that the Secretariat of the Convention has successfully established contacts with the World Heritage Centre and hoped that this can lead to a closer cooperation on cases of joint interest for both organisations.

The Bureau reminded again that in the frame of the Open case file 2013/1: North Macedonia: Hydro power development within the territory of Mavrovo National Park, an expert mission is going to take place in 2020 in the country. It requested the Secretariat to consider broadening the scope of the mission and to allow for the mission to also collect information from both the authorities and the Complainant and NGO community on this specific case. The Terms of Reference of the mission could also include discussions on the protection and status of all other candidate Emerald network sites in the country.

- 2017/3: Serbia: Possible negative impact of a harbor's construction on the confluence of the Sava into the Danube

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)6 - Government Report\]](#)
[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)13 - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the authorities for the report and their responsiveness but noted the lack of a report from the complainant. It reminded again of the importance of the area as stronghold for the cormorant and its other essential ecological functions, including for disaster risk reduction.

The Bureau requested from the authorities to report on progress for the second annual meeting of the Bureau in September 2020 on to provide conclusions of the EIA report. It further asked the complainant organisation to also come back with its own analysis of the EIA and development on the site.

- 2017/4: Ukraine: Presumed threat to Emerald site Tarutino (UA0000137) from cultivation developments

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)18 - Government Report\]](#)
[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)2 - NGO Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked both the authorities and the complainant for their reports. It noted and welcomed that no further negative actions had been reported by the complainant.

It requested that the complainant submits as soon as possible an update to the Bureau if negative actions occur again. The authorities are requested to submit a new report in two years or as soon as new developments are established.

- 2017/6: Iceland: Possible negative impact on Breiðafjörður Nature Reserve's authentic birch woods from new road infrastructure

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)5 - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)9 - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked both the complainant and the authorities for their reports.

The Bureau reminded again of the importance of the area for biodiversity conservation and the existence of a least harmful alternative for the road infrastructure planned.

The Bureau instructed the Secretariat to request a new updated report by the complainant, as soon as new information is available and at the latest for its upcoming meeting in March 2020. The authorities are also requested to submit an updated report on progress in the selection of the alternative for the road, through the competent authorities with the overall coordination of the Focal point of the Convention.

The Secretariat was also instructed to monitor the progress in the setting-up of the Emerald Network in the country, through the competent Group of Experts and the Standing Committee.

The Bureau decided that it will consider a possible upgrade of this case as a "possible file" at its upcoming meeting in March 2020, which will automatically put the case on the agenda of the Standing Committee meeting.

- 2018/1: Ukraine: Presumed threat to Emerald site "Polonina Borzhava" (UA0000263) from wind energy development

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)16 - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)15 - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the complainant for the report but noted the lack of an updated report from the authorities.

The Bureau expressed its concern over the allegations of the complainant regarding the EIA. The Bureau however notes that it needs advice for the assessment of the EIA and how it respects the national standard. The Secretariat is instructed to search for an expert who can do an external independent review of the EIA. A possible on-the-spot assessment could be considered for the case. The necessary funding for the review and OSA should be included in the Programme of work of the Convention for 2020 and be confirmed by the Standing Committee.

In the meantime, the Bureau recommends to the Ukrainian authorities to put the project on hold and to pay particular attention as the complaint is related to an Emerald Network site.

- 2018/2: Ukraine: Presumed threat to Emerald site "Black Sea Biosphere Reserve" (UA0000017) from military trainings

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)17 - Government Report\]](#)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)3 - NGO Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked both the authorities and the complainant for their updated reports.

It noted the progress on this case and the absence of new negative activities affective the site. Pending the submission of new updated reports by both the authorities and the complainant, will decide in March 2020 if the case will remain on the agenda or will be dismissed.

6.4 Other complaints

- 2018/5: Ukraine: Alleged threats to the Emerald Network sites Skhidnyi Svydovets, Marmaroski ta Chyvchyno-Hryniavski Hory and Carpathian biosphere Reserve

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)38 - Government Report\]](#)
[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)45 - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the authorities and the complainant for their updated reports.

The Bureau noted that the areas are Emerald network sites and noted that such developments are not in line with the objective of Emerald Network and their impact must be very carefully assessed. It noted that the EIA has been progressing and that a possible SEA might be requested, also due to the transboundary impact of the development.

Eventually, the Bureau reminded of the document regarding the ecological character of Emerald Network sites and requested the authorities to report on progress for its first annual meeting in March 2020, taking into account the Guidance document on the ecological character.

- 2018/6: Belarus: Presumed threats to Emerald Network sites Olmanskiye bolota (BY0000012) and Topila Bog (BY0000083)

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX - Government Report\]](#)
[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX - Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau thanked the authorities for the report but noted the lack of a report from the complainant.

The Bureau invited the complainant to submit an updated report for its first annual meeting in March 2020 and to comment on the information provided by the national authorities on the measures taken to assess the impact of the road infrastructure developments on the sites.

The Bureau will consider dismissing the case if no new report is submitted by the complainants.

- 2019/01: Ukraine: Possible negative effects of hydrocarbons extraction in four Emerald sites in Donetsk-Kharkiv region

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)39 – Government Report\]](#)
[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX – Complainant Report\]](#)

- 2019/02: Ukraine: Presumed threat to Emerald site Zatoky (UA0000214) from windfarm developments

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX – Government Report\]](#)
[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)43 – Complainant Report\]](#)

- 2019/03: Ukraine: Presumed threats to Emerald site Cholhynskiyi (UA0000178) from windfarm developments

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX – Government Report\]](#)
[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)44 – Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau discussed the complaints 2019/01, 2019/02 and 2019/03 jointly, due to lack of time. It also noted the lack of report by the national authorities on some of the cases.

The Bureau agreed the authorities of Ukraine to submit a report for its March 2020 meeting on all complaints and to use as much as possible the Guidance document on the ecological character. The complainants are also invited to report on new developments and progress for the same meeting.

These cases would be addressed at the March 2020 meeting of the Bureau.

7. FOLLOW-UP OF PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS AND CASE-FILES

- Recommendation No.190 (2016) on the conservation of natural habitats and wildlife, specially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)XX – Government Report\]](#)

[T-PVS/Files(2019)XX – Complainant Report]

- Recommendation No. 199 (2018) on the Pan-European Action Plan for the conservation of the sturgeon
- Recommendation No. 95 (2002) on the conservation of marine turtles in Kazanlı beach (Turkey)

[T-PVS/Files(2019)XX – Government Report]

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)41 – Complainant report\]](#)

- Recommendation No. 9 (1987) on the protection of *Caretta Caretta* in Laganas bay, Zakynthos (Greece)

[T-PVS/Files(2019)XX – Government Report]

[\[T-PVS/Files\(2019\)37 – Complainant Report\]](#)

Decision: The Bureau lacked enough time to discuss in detail all reports received but agreed that these should be made available for the Standing Committee at its 39th meeting. It further requested that the issues raised by the complainant on the follow-up of Recommendation No. 9 (1987) on the protection of *Caretta Caretta* in Laganas bay, Zakynthos (Greece) are discussed by the Committee and instructed the Secretariat to invite the authorities of Greece to report on the case.

The Bureau also noted that there are plans for the organisation of a side event at the 39th meeting, to discuss the progress in the implementation of Recommendation No. 199 (2018) on the Pan-European Action Plan for the conservation of the sturgeon.

The other two Recommendations will be debated at the Standing Committee only if there is a specific request by a Party.

8. 39TH STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING

8.1 Draft Agenda and planned side events

[T-PVS/Agenda(2019)I – Draft Agenda]

8.2 Draft Programme of Activities 2020-2021

[T-PVS(2019)XX – Programme of Activities and budget for 2020-2021]

The Secretariat presented a preliminary planning of the activities which could take place in the upcoming biennium and reminded that the discussion on the programme of activities for 2020-2021 at the Standing Committee should take place in the light of the current negotiations on the financing of the Convention and the expected staff turnover as from 2020.

Due in particular to the staffing difficulties and a growing workload, it was suggested to be conservative with the upcoming activities. The Secretariat also proposed that to hold the Standing Committee meeting every two years. Tasks such as analysis of reports, drafting of working documents, following-up of the Emerald Network implementation, etc., could also be outsourced to independent experts. It was also reminded that three successive calls for secondment had been unsuccessful so far and thus the Secretariat of 4 staff members has continued to implement activities as planned. However, this situation is untenable in the long term.

The Bureau held a long discussion on the options before the Convention and how work should be organised in the coming year and for the biennium. A clear majority of the Bureau members was in favour of keeping the annual occurrence of Standing Committee meetings. Otherwise, the workload assumed by it would have to be shifted to another organism, i.e. the Bureau and therefore a careful revision of the mandate and modus operandi of the Bureau will have to be drafted and adopted. Furthermore, complaints and case-files were already being treated too briefly. The Bureau also agreed that more time, and not less, was needed for ensuring a successful monitoring of case files and implementation of activities.

Regarding the staff changes and turnover, the Bureau further suggested to consider the appointment of certain focal points as “ambassadors” for certain thematic areas, based on the interest of some parties

for particular issues. The Bureau agreed that more financial support should be asked for from Parties and that this support should, whenever possible, be earmarked towards staff as activities are implemented by staff.

The Bureau also discussed a suggestion to increase the Standing Committee meeting from four to five days, to give more time for the discussions on financial issues. However, it was preferred to maintain four days, and to dedicate the Tuesday morning (first meeting day) to the budget and programme of activities discussion.

Decision: The Bureau acknowledged again the difficulties facing the Convention. It decided that the Standing Committee meetings should continue having an annual occurrence.

The Bureau instructed the Secretariat to revise the documents on finances as soon as possible and to send these to Parties together with a letter informing them on the situation and asking they attend the meeting with a clear mandate. When a reminder is sent out to Parties on the expected applications for Bureau members, Parties should be warned that the future Bureau members might be called upon to contribute more to the implementation of the Programme of work and act as advisers and “ambassadors” of certain issues on the agenda of the Convention throughout the year.

Eventually, the Bureau urged again Parties to submit voluntary contributions for 2019 and to carefully study the legal options for the creation of a compulsory financial mechanism for the Convention as a decision on the preferred option is expected at the upcoming Standing Committee meeting.

9. GEORGIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE: PROGRESS IN THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON THE LINKS BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION (STRASBOURG, 27 FEBRUARY 2020)

The Secretariat updated the Bureau on progress in the preparations for the high-level meeting being organised within the frame of the Georgian Presidency of the Council of Europe. The event will take place in Strasbourg on 27 February 2020 and a save the date is going to be sent out soon by the Georgian authorities.

The event will be an excellent opportunity to raise awareness of the Bern Convention and create synergies within the Council of Europe on environmental issues and human rights. The new Chair of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention will be invited to present the Convention and its role. It is hoped that the outcome of the event would be a declaration, inviting the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to elaborate further instruments on these issues, but also Guidance or other voluntary tools.

Decision: The Bureau took note of the information and expressed again its support for this important initiative. It considered that it might be very positive that a representative of the Georgian Presidency attends the meeting and informs about the high-level event and its expectations, as the Bern Convention Standing Committee benefits from the presence of specialised Ministries.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Secretariat warned the Bureau that the agenda of the upcoming 39th meeting of the Standing Committee is going to be very busy, as usual. It suggested allowing a shorter amount of time to present each case file before the presentation of national and NGO reports, as the background information is generally already well-known for all open and possible case-files which are discussed by the Standing Committee. Speakers during the Standing Committee should also be more strictly monitored as regards time, in order to streamline the agenda.

Decision: The Bureau agreed and suggested that the Secretariat uses PowerPoint slides as a visual background for each case file at the Standing Committee and agreed that the Chair should be stricter on the time allocation for each speaker.