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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	18th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP18) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (Geneva, 17-28 August 2019) - Information from the Presidency and the Commission

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Presidency and the Commission on the above subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Environment) meeting on 4 October 2019.

**18th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP18) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
(Geneva, 17-28 August 2019)**

- Information from the Presidency and the Commission -

The 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES CoP18) took place from 17 to 28 August in Geneva, Switzerland. The meeting had been postponed and moved to Geneva due to a difficult security situation in Colombo, Sri Lanka, where it was originally scheduled to take place.

The conference attracted some 1700 participants representing Parties to the Convention as well as intergovernmental and non-governmental observer organisations and media. The EU participated for the second time as a party in its own right alongside the 28 Member States.

The conference was well-managed and organised despite the changes in time and location. The European Commission as well as some Member States supported financially the organisation of CoP18 in the new location. CoP18 welcomed Ms Ivonne Higuero of Panama as the new Secretary-General of CITES. Costa Rica's offer to host CoP19 in 2022 was accepted.

The ambitious agenda of the meeting featured 107 agenda items with several sub-items, including 57 proposals to bring animal and plant species under the scope of the Convention or to change the level of protection of species already listed. There was a large number of proposals to reinforce monitoring, implementation and enforcement of obligations under the Convention, including initiatives to tackle increased illegal wildlife trade on digital platforms. The CoP adopted the CITES Strategic Vision post-2020, enabling CITES to remain a leader in promoting transformative change in wildlife conservation and management, and contributing to the forthcoming post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

CoP18 highlighted the urgency of taking concrete measures to address the threats to endangered animals and plants and underlining the pivotal role of CITES in this work. Most decisions of CoP18 were taken by consensus or by large majorities. This shows that, in most cases, the approved proposals are based on solid information, are accepted by range States and have potential to make a difference on the ground. However, a few high-profile decisions were taken against the preference of important range States, leading to protest of the countries concerned and increasing the risk of their alienation from the Convention.

The EU and its Member States acted on the basis of a Council decision adopted on 8 July 2019. The objectives of the EU and its Member States were fully met:

- The use of CITES as an instrument to regulate unsustainable international trade in marine species was strengthened by including three species of teatfish and certain species of sharks and rays in the lists of species protected by CITES.
- Better protection of species currently imported into the EU at unsustainable levels or illegally, notably for the exotic pet trade, was achieved by extending CITES protection to a range of reptiles and amphibians, in particular several geckos and newts.
- With regard to conservation of elephants, efforts to re-authorize international trade in ivory were rejected, as well as proposals to weaken the protection status of some elephant populations. A decision that restricts the export of live African elephants outside their natural range was adopted, with amendments made by the EU to exclude negative consequences that could have resulted from the original proposal.
- Proposed trade in southern white rhinoceros horns and live animals was not accepted.
- While adding new tropical timber species under CITES controls, the conference also amended an earlier listing of rosewoods and related tree species to ensure that small finished items, including musical instruments, could be carried across borders without the need for CITES permits, thus avoiding unnecessary administrative burden. The current CITES listing of Afrormosia (African teak) was revised, allowing better control of imports.
- CoP18 adopted decisions and resolutions aiming at better implementation and enforcement of the Convention, including a resolution on legal acquisition findings, thus helping to implement a key requirement under the Convention, i.e. the verification of the legal origin of CITES-listed specimens in international trade.

- CoP18 also established a CITES Big Cat Task Force with a mandate to promote conservation of tigers, lions, cheetahs, jaguars and leopards, and it made further efforts to improve controlling of illegal trade of the strictly protected pangolins. Giraffes were added to Appendix II of the Convention.
- A proposal to include entire genera of glass frogs in CITES was rejected. However, the EU signaled that it remains ready to discuss a more focused proposal that would address the effects of international trade in endangered glass frog species, in line with the CITES goals.
- Several proposals presented to CoP 18 focused on issues related to sustainable use, livelihoods and rural communities. Overcoming a wide range of differing views, the conference asked Parties to begin considering how to best engage indigenous peoples and local communities in CITES decision-making and implementation.
- Taking into account the considerably increased workload of the CITES Secretariat, two new temporary positions in the Secretariat, including one focused on marine species, were introduced in the budget for the next triennium.
- The Rules of Procedure of the CoP remained unchanged, which ensured that the EU could exercise its full rights as a Party, including the right to vote on issues of EU competence.

Speaking and voting with one united voice ensured strong negotiation power for the EU and its Member States. Effectively, no proposal was adopted or rejected against EU positions. The EU and its Member States exercised the right to vote in accordance with the declaration of competence submitted prior to the CoP.

The Presidency team (Finland, supported by Romania) led coordination on the spot and the Commission led negotiations on listing proposals and many other agenda items. Both were able to count on the support of other Member States' experts and on the good cooperation shown by all within the EU.

The EU actively reached out to key partners during the CoP. Two meetings with stakeholders were held with a large attendance from representatives of diverse organisations. The Presidency and the Commission together hosted an EU reception for heads and alternate heads of all delegations to the CoP.

The EU and the Member States will now need to implement the decisions and commitments taken at the CoP, including through amendments to the Annexes to Council Regulation (EC) No 338/97. This will also contribute to implementation of the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking, COM(2016) 87, on which the Council adopted conclusions in June 2016 and which is due to be evaluated in 2020.
