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### INFORMATION NOTE

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Delegations  
Subject: Outcome of the 44th meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) (Strasbourg, France, 2 - 6 December 2024)  
- Report by the Presidency and the Commission

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Delegations will find in the Annex a report by the former Hungarian Presidency and the Commission on the main outcomes of the abovementioned meeting.

**44th Standing Committee of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats**

**(Strasbourg, France, 2 – 6 December 2024)**

**- Information from the Presidency and the Commission -**

The Standing Committee of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats held its 44<sup>th</sup> annual meeting (SC44) from 2 to 6 December 2024 in Strasbourg, France. The meeting was chaired by Merike Linnamägi. 2024 marked the 45th anniversary of the Bern Convention.

The meeting was largely attended by both Parties and Observers, and it was dominated by the topic of the wolf, notably the proposal of the EU to downlist the wolf. This also attracted a lot of political attention, as well as citizens demonstrations, petitions, complaints and media enquiries.

EU coordination meetings took place early in the morning, during lunch break, after the sessions and allowed for all remaining non-adopted EU+MS Position papers to be finalised on the spot. The cooperation among EU MS and between the HU PCY and the COM was excellent and ensured a consistent and, in many cases, critical contribution influencing the decisions on various agenda points. As usual, there was no EU coordination for the case-files.

**List of decisions and adopted texts - [T-PVS\(2024\)Misc](#)**

**Proposal for amendment: Downlisting of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) from Appendix II to Appendix III of the Convention**

The EU and its Member States (EU+MS) proposed to downlist the wolf (*Canis lupus*) from Appendix II to Appendix III of the Bern Convention. At the request of the EU+MS, Contracting Parties were asked to vote. The EU on behalf of its 27 Member States and Andorra, Armenia, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Norway, North Macedonia, Serbia, Switzerland and Ukraine supported the amendment, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Monaco, Montenegro and the United Kingdom opposed it, and Tunisia and Türkiye abstained. With a majority of 38 votes in favour, the required two-thirds majority of the Contracting Parties was reached and the proposed amendment was adopted. The change would enter into force three months after the date of the formal adoption of the amendment, counted as of 6 December 2024, unless at least one third of the Parties to the Council of Europe's Bern Convention (17) object, in which case it will not enter into force. If fewer than one third of the Parties object, the decision will enter into force only for those Parties which have not objected. Contracting Parties were reminded that despite the change in the wolf's protection status, the rules of the Bern Convention still apply and need to be observed, and the wolf populations need to be maintained at, or brought to, a level which corresponds to ecological and scientific requirements. Their populations need to be kept out of danger and measures to be taken shall include the temporary or local prohibition of exploitation, as appropriate, in order to restore satisfactory population levels. Exceptions are only possible under the specific circumstances mentioned in Art.9 (1) of the Convention. Contracting Parties were asked to continue reporting on exceptions for the wolf every two years, and the SC requested the Expert Group on Large Carnivores to closely monitor the population of the wolf, in close cooperation with the Large Carnivores Initiative for Europe, and to report to the SC after each meeting of the Expert Group meeting.

The lengthy discussions on the downlisting of the wolf and the criticism about insufficient scientific basis of the EU proposal prompted some Parties to warn that there is a gap in the governance of the Bern Convention concerning the procedure and the scientific assessment of the proposals to down- or up-list species in the Appendices on the basis of evidence-based criteria. The UK proposed that the Conventions gives priority to filling this gap. The SC agreed unanimously with this conclusion and proposal and decided to create a Working Group on exploring mechanisms to guide amendments to the appendices of the Bern Convention to reflect on a dedicated evidence-based mechanism for granting or changing the protection status of a species, including to develop criteria for amending appendices I, II & III to the Bern Convention.

### **Finances and Programme of Work**

In spite of the reluctance of the Secretariat of the Council of Europe, the Standing Committee decided that, because of the uncertainties related to the Trust Fund, work on the amending protocol should be pursued, to fulfil the mandate given by the Committee of Ministers to ensure stable, sufficient, predictable, long-lasting and fair financing of the Convention. It adopted terms of reference of a Working Group on exploring sustainable financing options for the Bern Convention for that effect. The Standing Committee entrusted also the Working Group to consider any decisions that may be taken at the May 2025 session of the Committee of Ministers on the establishment of a Council of Europe Environment Trust Fund (CETF), and to propose the most appropriate solutions regarding financing options for the Bern Convention

On this basis, during the SC44, the Working Group on exploring sustainable financing options for the Bern Convention was established and was entrusted with the finalization of the draft protocol amending the Bern Convention and creating a mechanism of compulsory financial contributions and its explanatory report. Under its mandate, the Working Group is also tasked to consider any decisions that may be taken at the May 2025 session of the Committee of Ministers on the establishment of a dedicated Council of Europe Environment Trust Fund (CETF), and in particular how the Trust Fund could respond to the financial needs of the Bern Convention and to propose the most appropriate solutions regarding financing options for the Bern Convention for consideration by the September meeting of the Bureau of the Convention and the Standing Committee at its 45th meeting.

The Programme and budget were adopted. Further progress in the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Convention was envisioned, following the new and for the first-time prioritized Programme of Work.

### **Action Plan for the Eradication of the Ruddy Duck**

Progress Report on the Eradication of the Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) in the Western Palearctic on the implementation of the 2021–2025 action plan was provided. In the light of the current reported situation in European countries, considering the mobility of the species, as well as the growing efforts required to eradicate the last remnants of an introduced species, the target of the Ruddy Duck being functionally extinct in the wild in Europe will not be reached by 2025. Therefore, the SC concluded that the efforts should continue, and the expert group on this issue was tasked to draft a revised Action Plan for the period 2026–2030.

### **Pan-European Action Plan for the conservation of Sturgeons**

The mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the Pan-European Action Plan for Sturgeons was discussed at SC44. The technical guidelines supporting its effective implementation were welcomed and the recommendations on the assessment of the habitat of sturgeons, on sturgeon population monitoring, and on ex situ conservation measures for sturgeons were adopted.

### **Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest**

The SC44 strengthened the Emerald Network of sites, by providing further clarification on the legal framework of the obligations of Contracting Parties regarding the conservation of the network, laying out both mandatory commitments and non-mandatory measures that contribute to the protection of sites. The alignment of the Emerald Network Standard Data Form with the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form was greatly appreciated, although work to conclude this is still to be achieved. These decisions will advance the standardization of site protection regimes across the continent, increasing the efficiency of nature conservation efforts in Europe.

The SC44 expressed concern over the delays in the completion of the Emerald Network in Parties to Bern outside of the EU. The Committee called on the relevant countries to speed up their efforts and mandated the Secretariat to ensure support to these countries for submitting updated databases.

## **Reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) on the conservation status of species and habitats**

The SC44 endorsed the reporting format on the conservation status of species and habitats, and welcomed its alignment to the reporting format under Article 17 of the EU Habitats Directive. It acknowledged that a harmonized reporting for all Parties will allow measuring how well they comply with their obligations under the Convention. The SC44 endorsed the Checklist of species and habitats to be reported upon. The SC44 also endorsed the Guidelines on Explanatory Notes and on Concepts and Definitions, as well as the list of Invasive Alien Species considered as a possible threat to species and habitats protected by the Bern Convention.

In addition, the SC44 mandated the Secretariat to draft, in liaison with the Ad hoc Working Group on Reporting, Terms of Reference of a full-fledged Group of Experts on Reporting for the consideration of the 45th Standing Committee.

### **Case files**

Case Files are one of the core activities of the Bern Convention. Here, every Contracting Party (CP) speaks on its own behalf; there is no need for coordinated EU positions. Some case files are 'ever green', though the ongoing attention of the Standing Committee creates pressure to maintain the conservation momentum. Cases in the EU are usually related to infringements and cases in EU candidate countries, with warnings being expressed that alignment with EU standards is part of the accession process. The number of new cases regarding mining is raising, a workshop on minimizing the negative impact of mining on biodiversity is a possible item in the Programme of Work for 2025.

## **Elections**

The Standing Committee unanimously elected the Bureau members:

- Mr Carl Amirgulashvili (Georgia) as Chair;
- Mr Claude Origer (Luxembourg) as Vice-Chair;
- Mr Burak Tatar (Türkiye) as Bureau member;
- Mr Charles-Henri de Barsac (France) as Bureau member, on the condition of a formal nomination being received by the Secretariat by 31 January 2025. The SC unanimously agreed to deviate exceptionally for its Rules of Procedures to fulfill all the positions of the Bureau and enable its optimal functioning.

According to the Rules of Procedure, the Standing Committee also acknowledged the automatic election of the previous Chair, Ms Merike Linnamägi (Estonia), as a Bureau member.

### *Looking Forward to SC45*

SC45 is provisionally scheduled for the week starting on 8 December in Strasbourg. The preparations will take place during the EU Council Presidency term of Poland (January-June 2025) and Denmark (July-SC45 2025). In the intersessional period multiple Working Group and Expert Group meetings as well as three Bureau meetings will take place. The year 2025 also marks the 60th anniversary of the network of European Diploma Protected Areas which will be a great occasion to celebrate the achievements of the Convention and raise awareness in society to its continued successes.