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From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: 17th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (Johannesburg, South Africa, 24 September-5 October 2016)

- 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 17 October 2016.

17th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (Johannesburg, South Africa, 24 September–5 October 2016)

- Information from the Presidency and the Commission -

The 17th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES COP 17) took place from 24 September to 5 October in Johannesburg, South Africa. The COP was preceded by a one-day High Level event (Legotkla), which attracted some forty ministers. The Chair's summary of that event highlighted the achievements and significance of CITES including for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. From the EU side, Commissioner Vella attended and nine Member States were represented at political level. The COP itself was the biggest wildlife Conference ever, with 2500 participants, both Parties to the Convention and representatives of other international organisations as well as a large number of stakeholders. The EU participated for the first time as a Party in its own right alongside the 28 Member States, following the entry into force of the Gaborone Amendment to the Convention.

The agenda of the meeting featured some 120 concrete proposals to bring species under the scope of the Convention, change the level of protection for plants and animals already listed, and reinforce the monitoring, implementation and enforcement of obligations under the Convention.

COP 17 was extremely successful in further underlining the priority of tackling the current poaching crisis, and in taking concrete measures to address the threat to endangered animals and plants. The Conference achieved these results in a remarkably consensual manner, with most decisions taken on the basis of consensus of Parties or by large majorities. This shows that Parties recognise that the Convention delivers concrete results, provided proposals are based on solid information, have the acceptance of Range States and the potential to make a difference on the ground.

The EU and its Member States acted on the basis of a Council decision adopted on 20 September 2016 which established the position to be adopted on behalf of the EU at the meeting.

The ambitious agenda of the EU and its Member States was fully realised:

- A large number of rosewood timber species have been granted protection under CITES. In commercial terms this is by far the most important addition ever to CITES;
- A decision was taken to impose stricter rules on the export of hunting trophies, allowing these to be exported only when legality, sustainability and benefit to local populations and conservation is guaranteed;
- On ivory, the COP decided to end the discussion on a decision making mechanism for trade in ivory and called on CITES Parties to close domestic markets for ivory if they contribute to international ivory trafficking. The ban on international ivory trade was upheld, despite requests from some countries to reopen such trade. In line with the EU position, a proposal to transfer all elephant populations to CITES Appendix I was rejected. This proposal would not have strengthened the current ban on trade in ivory, but could have even led to undermining it as new reservations could have been entered;
- On the basis of EU proposals, several crocodile and shark species were given protection, as were a number of lizard and gecko species that are popular as pets in the EU. Another animal frequently traded as pet into the EU, the Barbary macaque, was granted protection too;
- The world's most trafficked animal, the pangolin, was given the highest level of protection and Parties agreed to adopt measures for stronger enforcement, capacity building and demand reduction;
- Progress was made in improving transparency in the financial support for the participation of developing countries to CITES meetings;
- CITES Parties committed for the first time to take comprehensive measures to address the significant problem of corruption associated to wildlife trade;
- On the institutional challenge of ensuring that the EU could exercise its full rights as a Party at COP 17, allowing it, in line with the Convention, to vote with 28 votes on certain proposals, a temporary solution was found and the EU voted on a significant number of agenda items, including all listing proposals that will, in the follow-up to the COP, necessitate legislative action at EU level. An intersessional process will be launched on the Rules of Procedure of the Convention to find a long- term agreement with other Parties on this issue which is of horizontal importance and under discussion also in other fora.

The practice of speaking and voting with one united voice ensured strong negotiation power for the EU and its Member States.

The Presidency team (Slovakia, supported by the Netherlands at this meeting) led coordination on the spot and was able to count on the constructive spirit and good cooperation shown by all within the EU.

Outreach was carried out at different levels, both political and technical, with key partners during the COP. Two meetings with stakeholders were held with a large attendance from representatives of diverse groups and organisations.

The Presidency (Minister László Sólymos) and the Commission (Commissioner Vella) also met with the MEPs present at the COP to update them on the state of negotiations and exchange views on some of the proposals.

The EU and the Member States will now need to implement the decisions and commitments taken at the COP. This is part of the broader efforts to implement fully the EU Action Plan against wildlife trafficking on which the Council adopted conclusions in June 2016.