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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Natura 2000 in the European Solidarity Corps
- Information from the Commission

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Commission on the above subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Environment) meeting on 28 February 2017.

Natura 2000 in the European Solidarity Corps

- Information from the Commission -

The European Solidarity Corps, which was launched by the Commission on 7 December 2016, is an initiative allowing young people to participate in a wide range of activities to show their solidarity either by volunteering or by gaining professional experience while helping to tackle challenges across Europe.

Many young Europeans are prepared to volunteer or work for a good cause in projects where their help makes a difference, and to show solidarity with those less fortunate. Finding the right opportunity can be difficult. Therefore, the objective of this initiative is to provide more opportunities for young people not only for volunteering activities, but also for taking on jobs that show solidarity – at home or abroad.

The European Solidarity Corps will provide young people with an opportunity to gain invaluable experience, develop their skills and make a contribution to society. It will offer more and better opportunities covering a broad range of activities, providing the right training and giving formal recognition to the skills and experiences gained.

The European Solidarity Corps will bring together two complementary strands: voluntary and professional.

The extremely strong environmental potential of this initiative is being harnessed thanks to the contribution of the LIFE programme.

Natura 2000 in the European Solidarity Corps

Under the volunteering strand of the European Solidarity Corps, young people will have a chance to contribute directly to the management and conservation of Natura 2000 sites and gain knowledge, learn new skills and enjoy the unique experience of Europe's diverse nature.

Activities could include the monitoring of species and habitats, restoration activities, reforestation and tree planting and care, wildfire prevention, identification and eradication of invasive alien species, ecological restoration or environmental clean-up. Volunteers could contribute to protecting core habitats and species as well as compatible farming or forestry practices.

The Natura 2000 network is an investment in nature that pays dividends for future generations. Natura 2000 is one of the EU's outstanding achievements. Stretching over 18 % of the EU's land area and almost 6 % of its marine territory, it is the largest coordinated network of protected areas in the world. And while nature is certainly beautiful in many ways, it is not only about aesthetics. From carbon storage to bee pollination, from water purification to flood prevention, nature and its ecosystems provide many vital services that are indispensable for our well-being and as fundamental drivers of our economy.

Additionally, in 2017 LIFE will partner with ERASMUS+ to offer young Europeans cross-border volunteering opportunities in the field of environment and climate.

The set-up of the European Solidarity Corps and its environmental strand can only be achieved with the active support of and in close cooperation with a broad range of key stakeholders, including public bodies and associations at international, European, national, regional and local level, networks at EU and other levels, NGOs and businesses.

