EU action plan against wildlife trafficking

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PURPOSE: to propose EU action plan against trafficking in wildlife.

BACKGROUND: wildlife trafficking – particularly in elephants and rhinos, corals, pangolins, tigers and great apes - has become **one of the world's most profitable organised crimes**. As an example, the illicit ivory trade has more than doubled since 2007, and is over three times greater than it was in 1998. Between 2007 and 2013, rhino poaching increased by 7000% in South Africa, endangering the very survival of this species. Sources estimate the profits from such trafficking at **between EUR 8 and EUR 20 billion annually.**

The EU has an important role to play in tackling this traffic, as **Europe is currently a destination market** and a hub for trafficking in transit to other regions. It is also a region from which certain species are sourced for illegal trade.

Numerous measures to combat wildlife trafficking have been adopted under the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES),** a key international treaty regulating the international trade in wildlife, to which the EU became a party in 2015. **The EU has already shown leadershi**p in tackling the illegal trade in natural resources by adopting ambitious policies on timber and fishery products.

The European Parliament called for an Action Plan in a resolution adopted in January 2014. The establishment of an EU Action Plan has also been supported by many EU Member States, international organisations, NGOs, and concerned businesses at a stakeholder consultation on the EU approach against wildlife trafficking, launched by the Commission in February 2014.

CONTENT: the EU Action Plan demonstrates that the EU is ready to live up to international expectations and commitments, and that it is **raising the level of its ambition as regards action against the illegal trade in wildlife.** It is a major contribution towards the Sustainable Development Goals set under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development agreed by heads of state at a UN summit in September 2015.

The EU Action Plan **comprises a series of measures to be taken by EU institutions and/or Member States.** It provides the impetus and framework for making better use of existing EU resources. The measures are essentially designed to improve cooperation between all the players concerned, make more effective use of existing tools and policies, and strengthen synergies between them, so that wildlife trafficking can be better tackled across the EU and globally.

The measures, which are designed to address a complex problem **holistically** by involving all relevant organisations, are based on three priorities:

1) Preventing wildlife trafficking and addressing its root causes:

- **reduce the demand for and the supply of illegal wildlife products**, both within the EU and globally, by supporting specific campaigns and further limiting ivory trade within and from the EU ;
- ensure that **rural communities** in source countries are more engaged in wildlife conservation, and that they benefit more from it;
- engage more actively with **relevant business sectors**, ranging from those active in wildlife trade or using wildlife products to those that provide services to the trade;

- take multilateral and bilateral measures to **tackle corruption**, a crucial enabling factor for wildlife trafficking throughout the enforcement chain.

2) Implementing and enforcing existing rules and combating organised wildlife crime more effectively:

- review shortcomings in implementation for all Member States, and develop strategies for tackling them, to ensure that **existing rules are enforced more consistently** across the EU;
- strengthen the **strategic aspect of checks and enforcement** by setting enforcement priorities jointly and having Europol and Eurojust provide dedicated support for cross-border cases;
- **boost the capacity of all links in the enforcement chain** and the judiciary to take effective action against wildlife trafficking in the EU. By improving inter-agency data flow and by sharing best practice at EU level;
- ensure **targeted awareness-raising** amongst specialists on organised crime, cybercrime and money laundering;
- ensure that Member States' laws on organised crime cover wildlife trafficking and that appropriate **penalties** can be imposed for trafficking ;
- improve **international cooperation on enforcement** through participation in international law enforcement operations, technical assistance and targeted financial support.

3) Strengthening the global partnership of source, consumer and transit countries against wildlife trafficking:

- take measures to **step up funding** to support developing countries in their efforts to combat wildlife trafficking;
- use more efficiently the **diplomatic tools** of the EU and its Member States and other tools, notably EU trade policy, in relations with key source, transit and consumer countries and relevant regional organisations;
- develop **better tools** to tackle the links between wildlife trafficking and security that exist in some regions;
- use the existing **multilateral processes**, in international agreements and fora, to keep the issue on the global agenda.

Monitoring and evaluation: the Action Plan covers the five years from 2016 to 2020. The Commission services and the EEAS will establish a scoreboard to monitor implementation. The Commission will report to the Council and the European Parliament by **July 2018** on implementation of the action plan, Progress made and the success of the action plan in curbing wildlife trafficking will be **evaluated in 2020**. On that basis, the Commission will consider what further action is needed.

The Action Plan will supersede Commission Recommendation No 2007/425/EC identifying a set of actions for the enforcement of Regulation (EC) No 338/97 on the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade therein.