EU action plan against wildlife trafficking

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted an own-initiative report by Catherine BEARDER (ADLE, UK) in response to the Commission communication aiming to propose an EU action plan against wildlife trafficking.

Members recalled that wildlife trafficking is an organised international crime which is estimated to be worth approximately **EUR 20 billion annually**, becoming one of the biggest and most profitable forms of organised cross-border crime.

Wildlife trafficking has **major negative impacts on biodiversity**, existing ecosystems, the natural heritage of the countries of origin, natural resources and the conservation of species. It is a serious and growing threat to global security.

Welcoming the Commission action plan against wildlife trafficking, Members called on the European Commission, the Member States, the European External Action Service and the EU agencies Europol and Eurojust to **recognise that wildlife crime is a serious and growing threat** and to address it with the greatest political urgency.

The report highlighted the need: (i) for **comprehensive and coordinated approaches** across policy areas including trade, development, foreign affairs, transport and tourism, and justice and home affairs; (ii) to provide **adequate financial resources** in the EU budget and the national budgets in order to ensure effective implementation of this plan; (iii) to set up an ongoing detailed monitoring and evaluation mechanism to measure progress.

The Commission is called upon to establish a **dedicated Wildlife Trafficking Coordinator's office**, mirroring the model used to fight human trafficking.

Preventing wildlife trafficking and addressing its root causes: Members called for a targeted and coordinated series of **awareness-raising campaigns** by the EU, third countries, stakeholders and civil society with the aim of reducing demand related to the illegal trade in wildlife products. They called on the EU to **address corruption** and the shortcomings of international governance measures across the wildlife trafficking chain.

The report insisted on the need to **provide assistance, guidance and training** to authorities in source, transit and destination countries concerning investigation, enforcement and judicial procedures at local, regional and national level.

The governments of the supply countries are urged to: (i) improve the rule of law and create effective deterrents by strengthening **criminal investigation, prosecution and sentencing**; (ii) enact stronger laws treating illicit wildlife trafficking as a '**serious crime**'; (iii) commit to a **zero-tolerance** policy on corruption.

Making implementation and enforcement more effective: Member States are called upon to put in place wildlife trafficking action plans detailing enforcement policies and penalties, and to publish and **exchange the information** on seizures and arrests relating to wildlife crimes, in order to ensure consistency and harmonised approaches between Member States.

Members proposed that the penalties for wildlife trafficking, especially in areas with vulnerable marine ecosystems or falling within the Natura 2000 network, should be sufficiently severe as to deter potential offenders. They also stressed that in order to avoid the 'migration' of wildlife criminal networks, the harmonisation of policies and legal frameworks with respect to wildlife crime is particularly important.

Members are urged to set appropriate levels of sanctions for wildlife crime offences and for the Commission to take steps towards establishing and implementing common minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions relating to wildlife trafficking.

Strengthening the global partnership: the report called on the Commission and the Member States to **step up dialogue and cooperation with source, transit and destination countries** in the wildlife trafficking supply chain and to provide them with technical and economic assistance and diplomatic support. It called for a trust fund or similar facility to be set up with the objective of safeguarding protected areas and combating wildlife trafficking and poaching.

The Commission is called upon to include **mandatory and enforceable sustainable development chapters in all EU trade agreements and negotiations**, with specific reference to halting illegal trade in wildlife in all economic sectors.

EU as a destination market, source and transit point: Members called on the EU to review the existing legislative framework with a view to supplementing it with a prohibition on the making available and placing on the market, transport, acquisition and possession of wildlife that has been illegally harvested or traded in third countries. They suggested:

- the adoption of a **precautionary approach** for the import of hunting trophies from species protected under the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations;
- the **full and immediate ban** at European level of trade, export or re-export within the EU and to destinations outside the EU of ivory.

The report also called on the EU to strengthen the existing control instruments, including the use of **traceability mechanisms**. The transport sector should play a pivotal role, for example by implementing an early warning detection system. The role of **public-private partnerships** is highlighted in this regard.

Lastly, the report called for Member States to introduce in-country compliance monitoring with regular checks on traders and permit holders such as pet shops, breeders, research centres and nurseries, and including monitoring of trades such as fashion, art, medicine and catering, that may use illegal plant and animal parts.