Resolution on the EU strategic objectives for the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to be held in Panama from 14 to 25 November 2022

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The European Parliament adopted by 549 votes to 28, with 50 abstentions, a resolution on the EU strategic objectives for the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to be held in Panama from 14 to 25 November 2022.

The EU is a major hub, transit point and destination for legally and illegally sourced specimens of wild fauna and flora, whether living or dead, body parts or products thereof. CITES is the largest global wildlife conservation agreement, with 184 signatory parties, including the EU and its 27 Member States which aims to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants does not pose a threat to the survival of the species in the wild.

In its resolution, Parliament highlighted the need for a **more precautionary approach** to the protection of wildlife given the continued threat posed by the wildlife trade to individual animals, species, human and animal health and the environment. It expressed concern that the market for exotic pets and the range of affected species are growing both within the EU and internationally. The EU's goal should be to eliminate all illegal trade in CITES-listed wildlife species so that by **2025** there would only be legal and sustainable trade in wild fauna and flora.

Implementation, compliance and enforcement

There is a series of **weaknesses** in CITES, such as compliance, enforcement, the need for science-based quotas, funding, combating corruption and demand reduction. According to Parliament, these weaknesses should be tackled to better implement the convention. There is a need for the **consistent and impartial application** of the instruments provided for in CITES and the decisions taken under it to promote compliance with the convention.

In this regard, the EU, Member States and all parties are called on to:

- develop measures to ensure adequate and timely compliance with the convention, including by dedicating the **necessary resources** to it and by adopting effective national legislation to implement decisions and resolutions adopted in the framework of the convention;

- adopt strict measures, including dissuasive **sanctions**, in cases of non-compliance when it is found that a party is undermining the effectiveness of the convention and is not effectively stopping illegal or unsustainable exploitation and trade, and, as a last resort, to suspend trade with the offending party;

- work to ensure protection for whistleblowers, journalists, wildlife rangers and environmental and human rights defenders, who play an essential part in protecting the environment and in putting a stop to the illegal wildlife trade;

- establish **specialised units** focusing on wildlife crime at the national level and strengthen law enforcement training on the wildlife trade;

- create an **EU-wide database** of court cases on environmental crimes, including wildlife crimes, and on the actions carried out in the field of environmental crimes by law enforcement bodies.

Moreover, to effectively combat the involvement of organised criminal groups, the resolution stated that transnational wildlife crime should be recognised as **serious organised crime** under the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

EU action plan against wildlife trafficking

Parliament welcomed the renewed commitment to the EU Action Plan against wildlife trafficking but stressed the need for adequate funding and clear and implementable targets and actions as well as a monitoring and evaluation mechanism. They also underlined the need to tackle both online and offline trade in the revised Action Plan.

It called on the EU to review and expand the existing legislation regulating wildlife trade to make it illegal to import, export, sell, acquire or buy wild animals or plants that are taken, possessed, transported or sold in violation of the law of the country of origin or transit.

One Health approach

The resolution recalled that 70 % of emerging diseases and pandemics are of animal origin. It pointed out that the risk of pandemics can be significantly lowered by **reducing human activities that drive biodiversity loss** and that the estimated cost of reducing the risk of pandemics is 100 times lower than the cost of responding to them. In this regard, it called for the **urgent adoption** of a new resolution that encourages parties to institutionalise a 'One Health' approach to wildlife use and trade, using the operational definition of One Health developed by the One Health High-Level Expert Panel, when implementing the convention and in their national laws, and to undertake appropriate risk analyses and prevention programmes with respect to animal, human and environmental health when considering applications for wildlife trade-related permits and certificates.

Parliament noted with concern that significant quantities of meat from domestic and wild animals are still smuggled into Member States by air passengers, posing risks to animal and human health and biodiversity. Therefore, it called on the Commission to step up data collection on this issue with the Member States and to support and coordinate an **EU response to illegal meat imports**.

Amendments to the CITES appendices

Lastly, Parliament expressed its strong support for the listing proposals submitted by the EU and its Member States to amend the appendices to CITES. It also showed support for:

- proposals to CoP19 to list species or to move them from Appendix II to Appendix I that are put forward or supported by range countries;

- proposals submitted to CoP19 to better protect **reptiles, amphibians, birds, fish and mammals** that are threatened by the international trade for the pet market, acknowledging that the market for exotic pets and the range of affected species are growing both within the EU and internationally;

- recommendations to strengthen the protection and conservation of species, including **sharks and rays, marine turtles, seahorses, big cats, elephants, Tibetan antelope and saiga antelope;**

- advocate the inclusion of **all African elephant populations** in Appendix I of CITES.