



PRESS RELEASE

FACE: EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF ASSOCIATIONS FOR HUNTING & CONSERVATION

COMBATING WILDLIFE CRIME

Why involving local communities and hunters are key to success

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 12 May 2015 – Africa is facing its biggest poaching crisis ever. In Europe illegal wildlife practices still pose a challenge across the continent. In an attempt to identify strategies to successfully combat wildlife crime, the European Parliament’s Intergroup “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” convened an expert panel that exchanged views with Members of the European Parliament and key officials from the competent services of the European Commission. The meeting took place under the auspices of the Intergroup President MEP Karl-Heinz Florenz (EPP, Germany) and was chaired by MEP Renata Briano (S&D, Italy).

MEP Karl-Heinz Florenz, in his introduction, stressed that “the current wildlife crime crisis must be addressed through inclusive policies. Meaningful conservation and enforcement must take into account that in areas where emblematic wild species, such as the rhino and elephant, have true monetary value they are managed and protected against poaching, mostly with the active collaboration of local stakeholders”.

MEP Renata Briano stressed the importance of dealing with the issue in an objective and science-based manner at all necessary levels - Member State, EU and international - with due respect to the relevant competences. “Poachers are the worst enemies of the hunters”, she said. “Hunting is a legal and perfectly legitimate activity that enables a better management of the environment. Hunters are key partners in the combat against wildlife crime both through the important funding they raise and their work in the field”.

Dr Rolf Baldus from the **International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC)** spoke based on his 13 years of experience of working for Africa’s oldest game reserve, the Selous, under German-Tanzanian development cooperation. Despite its challenges, poaching could be stopped in the Selous through the implementation of a policy of “conservation by the people, instead of conservation from the people”.

The core idea behind this success was to incentivize local people to value and conserve wildlife through community-based sustainable use management programmes. The greatest portion of the income through these programmes – some 90 percent of the 3 million annual budget – came from hunting, and benefitted the local communities and was used in monitoring and enforcement against poaching.

This, however, required a departure from the mainstream ideas of today’s Western urban policy makers of imposing protectionism and blanket bans on wildlife use in African countries. Regrettably, despite its success the programmes were eventually not renewed. This resulted in a steep fall in revenues with the consequence that poaching surged. Dr Baldus concluded, “if we make the mistake of banning sustainable use and hunting, we risk losing wildlife”.

Janice Weatherley-Singh, Director Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) highlighted in her presentation that wildlife crime is not just a conservation issue, but it is just as much an economic and development issue – it hits wildlife tourism which plays a big role in local economies – as well as being a security issues – revenues from illegal ivory trade fuel armed groups especially on the African continent, undermining the peace and security of regions.

As part of a greater strategy, the WCS seeks to address the problem along the whole wildlife trade chain, from poaching sites to points of final sale. This entails being present in the core protected areas to prevent poaching from taking place; establish networks in towns and villages in and around sites where middlemen buy and sell wildlife; monitor transport nodes where trade flows converge – such as international borders, seaports and airports; and follow through to points of final sales in urban areas where products are sold to consumers. She appealed to the EU and its Member States to ensure the allocation of sufficient resources for effective implementation, and she welcomed the recent funding initiative by DG DEVCO of the European Commission.

Cy Griffin from the **Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU (FACE)** explained how hunters' organisations have gradually stepped up their involvement in the combat against poaching. Since 2009 collaboration has been carried out with the ornithologist organisation, BirdLife International, and a number of various initiatives against the illegal killing and trade of birds at Council of Europe and EU level resulted in a concrete EU roadmap in 2012 with streamlined initiatives to avoid overlap.

In terms of communicating, Mr Griffin underscored that language matters. This is why the fifty European countries, including the EU-28, having signed up to the Bern Convention agreed in a Recommendation on the illegal killing, trapping and trade of wild birds, that anti-poaching should be based on the following principles:

- (i) this is about illegal killing of birds, not legal hunting;
- (ii) zero tolerance of illegal killing of wild birds;
- (iii) recognition of legal hunting and sustainable use.

Mr Griffin concluded that “we should not impose heavier restrictions on those who follow the law – we need them on our side – but rather single out those who are in breach of the law”.

Gaël de Rotalier, Policy Officer for DG Environment of the **European Commission**, reminded participants that the EU is both a transit place and destination for wildlife products of illegal origin, such as reptiles, live birds, lynx fur, timber, rhino horns, ivory, pangolin scales (one of the most trafficked mammals in the world), etc. The EU is also illegally exporting live glass eels. In that sense the EU could be said to be part of the problem, but we can also and should be part of the solution, he argued.

The Commission is taking the issue of wildlife crime seriously, and some of its priorities are to raise the profile of wildlife trafficking on the EU diplomatic agenda; focus on the correct implementation of laws and international agreements; foster better coordination in the field of enforcement; better integrate wildlife conservation and the fight against wildlife trafficking into the EU development cooperation; address the demand for wildlife products of illegal origin; involve local communities and address poverty as necessary condition for successful, long term strategy against wildlife trafficking; and have more training and awareness-raising.



Mr de Rotalier took the opportunity to reveal for the first time publically that the Commission will develop an EU Action Plan against wildlife trafficking which will encompass both the domestic and the global dimensions of the problem.

MEP Catherine Bearder introduced the newly established cross-party group “MEPs for Wildlife”, of which she is part. Its focus is on the criminal activities, Ms Bearder underlined. These destabilise local communities and are drivers behind worldwide organised crime. Also protecting species is vital to hunters and hunting, she underlined, and that hunting has to be managed sustainably.

The demand side, in particular in China has to be dealt with. If the government in China so wished, she argued, they could stop the negative trend for species such as the rhino.

She called on decision makers as well as civil society and interest organisations to keep closely in touch with each other and work together.

She welcomed the European Commission’s Action Plan, and expressed hope that the plan would include points on legislation being properly implemented and that infractions lead to prosecution.

MEP Franz Obermayr recalled the serious situation regarding wildlife crime globally and argued that, in finding solutions, we need to understand and take into account the dimension of human-wildlife conflicts. Farmers are angry because their cattle are being killed by wildlife; in Africa sometimes people are being killed.

He cautioned against restrictions on sustainable use and took the example of the black rhino. Five black rhinos from South Africa can be traded annually for hunting trophy purposes, and each generates some 350 000 dollars to help conserving the species and fight poaching. Only dominant, non-reproductive males are allowed to be taken in this programme. These are animals that would have been removed by the State anyway, in order to allow younger reproductive males to be more successful in reproduction. He compared this to the 1215 rhinos that are being poached, and said that the money from the five hunted rhinos are being very useful in the combat against poaching of all these other rhinos.

Mr Obermayr called upon the Commission to work together with the hunters’ organisations, FACE, CIC and SCI, and he underlined that “we do not want to fight hunters, we want to fight the poaching”, and he urged everybody to make a clear distinction between the two.

The next meeting of the Intergroup will take place in June in Brussels. Detailed information will follow soon.

*****ENDS*****



NOTES TO EDITORS:

FACE is the European Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation. Established in 1977, FACE represents the interests of Europe's 7 million hunters as an international non-profit-making nongovernmental organisation (NGO). FACE is made up of national hunters' associations from 35 European countries including the EU-28. FACE also has 5 Associate Members and is based in Brussels.

FACE upholds the principle of sustainable use, has been a member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since 1987, and more recently of Wetlands International. FACE works with its partners on a range of hunting-related issues, from international conservation agreements to local implementations with the aim of sustaining hunting across Europe. www.face.eu

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