Note for the attention of the Presidency
Plenary Session of the European Parliament
Strasbourg 4 - 7 February 2013

Item: Oral Question 0201/12: Preparations for CITES (COP 16)
Debate foreseen: Tuesday 5 February afternoon

SPEAKING POINTS

President,
Honourable Members,

- The Council is working on the EU position for COP 16 and will adopt a decision ahead of the conference. The Parliament will therefore be informed of this decision.

- The Presidency will make sure that at COP 16 in March in Bangkok, as at previous CITES Conference of Parties, the EU Member States will act jointly to defend the agreed position of the European Union and therefore speak with one voice.
This year, the CITES Convention celebrates 40 years of existence. During these past years, CITES has proved itself to be an important instrument against the overexploitation of our natural resources. Constant discussion and improvement of the implementation have shown, many times over, that it is possible to have sustainable trade and attain the objectives of the Convention if all Parties apply the rules and also accept necessary restrictions.

As usual, the Agenda for this Conference covers many issues from strategic questions to enforcement, compliance and conservation. Each issue involves a different degree of complexity and, at times, may lead to controversy.

The future effectiveness of CITES and its role in a global, complex and regulated world will be influenced by decisions on many specific items. The decisions taken, whether on plant or animal species, will show whether CITES Parties are prepared to find acceptable solutions between different countries and views, between conservation needs and economic justification.

We have always maintained that any amendments to the CITES appendices should be based on the conservation status of the species concerned and the listing criteria developed by CITES. They should, furthermore, take account of the contribution that CITES controls can make to improving conservation status, minimise unnecessary administrative burdens and ensure that Parties’ resources are directed towards issues of real conservation concern.
• It is not by chance that several proposals touch the question of livelihoods. The EU and its Member States have always tried to find a way forward in cooperation with other Parties, especially those who are not in the position of having sufficient resources for the satisfactory implementation of CITES. I am hopeful that other Parties will share this view.

• But we also go to Bangkok having put a number of important proposals on the table. As at previous COPs, this time again we will try to ensure the enhanced protection status of sharks.

• We have also tabled proposals on the transparency of voting and on the conflicts of interest, both of which relate essentially to increasing transparency. Transparency should be at the heart of the development of conservation policies and practices within the Convention, for a number of reasons.

• Firstly, the use of secret ballots can cast doubts on the basis on which decisions are made within CITES. Indeed, it becomes impossible to demonstrate that such decisions are based on the use of the agreed, scientific criteria.

• Secondly, the proposals seek to translate within CITES some of the outcomes of the Rio+20 Summit last year with respect to the kind of institutions we want in order to achieve sustainable development.
- Finally, we remain convinced that undertaking specific steps to move such governance reforms forward can not only result in tangible benefits in terms of increased protection and better management practices, but will also sustain and reinforce the spirit of partnership among Parties, in the realisation of a common objective. We are of course particularly encouraged by the strong and consistent support of the European Parliament in this respect.

- The Presidency, together with the Commission and the Member States, is determined to take an active role to ensure that the CITES Convention continues to be an effective tool in order to attain its two main objectives: conservation and sustainable management of our natural resources. It is our intention to engage with other Parties in promoting our proposals, but also in looking for acceptable solutions that encompass the need for species conservation and, at the same time, respect the means for subsistence of populations with fewer or insufficient resources.

- We are therefore prepared to conduct the upcoming deliberations in the spirit of cooperation, mutual understanding and the joint interest in the protection of species that are threatened by trade to maintain a diverse environment for our future generations.