



Brussels in Brief

Biodiversity and wildlife trade

Wildlife trade is the sale and exchange of live species (animals and plants) and wildlife products. The trade includes hundreds of millions of specimens bought and sold in the world market and it is estimated to be worth billions of euros every year. In addition, the illegal wildlife trade is the second largest illegitimate trade after narcotics resulting in significant revenue on the black market.

Wildlife trade, both legal and illegal, is constantly increasing and the European Union is one of the largest wildlife trade markets today. For example, in 2005 the value of legal wildlife trade in the EU was EUR 93 billion. The EU is the main market for a number of products. It is also responsible for 95% of the global vicuña wool and 50% of caviar imports. The Union is also the main destination for tropical timber. The EU enlargement has also increased the Union's role in the global wildlife trade market.

Unsustainable and illegal wildlife trade is a major threat to biodiversity in range states, i.e. countries in which traded species occur. Intensive trade can significantly contribute to depleting species populations and it has been known to bring a number of species close to extinction. Changes in species populations can lead to alterations in the structure, composition and dynamics of ecosystems, including the loss of various ecosystem services. Changes in ecosystem functioning can also advance the invasion of alien species into an area. These changes can have severe socio-economic consequences to local communities that depend on natural resources for their everyday subsistence.

Most species and products subject to wildlife trade originate from developing countries. Therefore, sustainable wildlife trade is increasingly seen as a tool to assist the economic growth and alleviation of poverty in these areas. It is also considered that appropriately managed wildlife trade can increase the value of natural ecosystems to local communities and consequently support the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems in range states.

As one of the main players in wildlife trade, the EU has a duty to control unsustainable trade and assist in preventing the consequent decline and extinction of species. This issue of Brussels in Brief outlines the EU legal and policy framework for regulating wildlife trade. It also summarises some problems hindering effective control of trade and discusses the main challenges for the future.

EU legal and policy framework for regulating wildlife trade

The EU is not a Party to CITES as such, however its involvement in the implementation of the Convention dates back

The FLEGT licensing system gained legal status in 2005 when a Regulation on the establishment of a FLEGT voluntary licensing scheme for imports of timber into the European Community was adopted (Council Regulation (EC) No 2173/2005). The Regulation establishes a Community set of rules for the import of timber products under the FLEGT schemes.

The EU has already begun a market-based approach to timber imports from the United States, which will be implemented in 2005. This approach is based on the EU's FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) initiative, which aims to ensure that timber imported into the EU is legally sourced. The EU has already begun a market-based approach to timber imports from the United States, which will be implemented in 2005. This approach is based on the EU's FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) initiative, which aims to ensure that timber imported into the EU is legally sourced. The EU has already begun a market-based approach to timber imports from the United States, which will be implemented in 2005. This approach is based on the EU's FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) initiative, which aims to ensure that timber imported into the EU is legally sourced.

need to strengthen the cooperation and coordination among Member States in the future. In addition, the coordination among national agencies was to be improved.

It has also been acknowledged that even though the EU

Regulations provide a framework for legislative work, it is not possible to achieve the same level of effectiveness as in the national context. The Commission has to be more proactive in the legislative process and to ensure that the EU Regulations are implemented in a timely and effective manner.

Improve the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations

The common view among EU Member States is that the Wildlife Trade Regulations are an effective tool for combating the illegal trade in endangered species. They are also considered as a positive conservation tool for keeping the trade of protected species within sustainable limits.

However, the situation in the EU has changed since the adoption of the Regulations in 1996. For example, after the latest accessions to the Union the number of countries involved in wildlife trade in the EU has almost doubled. Consequently, what may have been a sufficient means of regulating trade in the past could become insufficient or become too complex to be effectively implemented. Changes in the dynamics of wildlife trade need to be met with changes in the way wildlife trade is regulated.

Some potential key areas for further analysing or improving the Wildlife Trade Regulation could include, for example, simplifying the text and procedures of the regulations, clarifying definitions and improving the coordination between the Wildlife Trade Regulations and other EU legislative instruments.¹² In any case, all proposed changes should be considered in the context of other related international, Community and national legislation.

Advancing cooperation and coordination in wildlife trade enforcement

Coordination and cooperation between the EU Member States are key elements in enhancing the enforcement of CITES and Wildlife Trade Regulations. The new EU European Community Action Plan on CITES Enforcement is a welcomed attempt to synchronize the Member States efforts in wildlife trade control. However, fulfilling the Action Plan's priorities, such as adopting national action plans and establishing procedures for coordination and information exchange, requires adequate commitment and resources from the Member States.

The potential role of the internet in improving cooperation and coordination could also be considered. The internet could be used, for example, to facilitate and coordinate the EU-wide administration of wildlife trade control, e.g. issuing permits and certificates, and linking the administrative system with the electronic processing of customs procedures.

Linking wildlife trade more closely with sustainable development

Finally, there is a need for linking wildlife trade regulation with global sustainable development. This means that the traditional measures for wildlife trade control, both at international and EU level, should incorporate and/or be complemented with measures supporting the delivery of goals related to sustainable development, reduction of poverty and biodiversity loss.

EU external assistance should be effectively used to support the wildlife trade regulation and conservation of CITES species and ecosystems in the range states. The EU and Membe