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THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

from : General Secretariat
to : Delegations

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- COM(2008) 789 final

Subject : Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament,
the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions:
Towards an EU Strategy on invasive species

Delegations will find annexed an information note from the Commission on the above subject, which will be dealt with under "other business" at the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 4 December 2008.

**Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions:
Towards an EU Strategy on invasive species**

Information Note from the Commission

- On 3 December 2008 the Commission adopted the Communication "Towards an EU Strategy on Invasive Species".
- The main drivers directly affecting biodiversity are habitat change, climate change, overexploitation, pollution and invasive species (IS)¹.
- IS are animals, plants and also bacteria and fungi that are introduced accidentally or deliberately into a country or region where they are not normally found and which then become established and widely spread with negative consequences for native species and ecosystems.
- In addition to the damage they cause to the local ecology, IS may also have severe impacts on commercial species of livestock and plants and on human health. The economic impacts of IS are significant.
- The threat from IS is growing as these unwanted introductions are often associated with the expansion in the trade of plant and animal materials.
- Current EU legislation is not sufficient to reduce the threat posed by IS and there is no coordinated action between the Member States. Measures taken by one Member State can be completely negated by the absence of action in neighbouring countries.
- In its 2006 Communication on Halting the Loss of Biodiversity and Beyond² and its associated Action Plan, the Commission identified the need for a comprehensive EU strategy to tackle IS.

¹ Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005.

² COM(2006) 216 final.

- The present Communication examines the evidence regarding the impact of IS in Europe; it analyses the effectiveness of the current legal situation in tackling this problem and describes 4 possible options for a future EU strategy. These are
 - (a) The "**Business as usual**" option provides a reference point against which other options can be assessed. But clearly, if no action is taken, IS will continue to become established in the EU with increased associated ecological, economic and social consequences and related costs.
 - (b) **Maximising the use of existing legal instruments together with voluntary measures**, including codes of conduct, and the establishment of an "early warning and information system". The main advantage of this option is that it would not require new legislation. Coordination of the package of ad hoc arrangements could prove challenging. Finally, a system which is built on voluntary undertakings by Member States and voluntary codes of conduct would only be as effective as the weakest link in the chain.
 - (c) **Adapting existing legislation**, which would address some of the existing legal uncertainties, would be addressed without creating new legislation, but coverage of the invasive species problem would still not be comprehensive and coordination would remain a significant challenge.
 - (d) **Developing a comprehensive, dedicated EU legal instrument**. This option implies the development of a comprehensive dedicated legal framework to tackle invasive species in a comprehensive manner taking into account existing legislation. This option would be the most effective in terms of control of invasive species. It would provide the greatest legal clarity whilst respecting the principle of proportionality. However, there would be administrative costs for the Member States and for the Commission, as well as direct costs for economic operators, although these costs are likely to be considerably less than the costs of inaction.
- The Commission hopes to receive input from the Council and the European Parliament in choosing among those options, and hopes for close cooperation in developing the EU Strategy on Invasive Species with a view to its delivery by 2010.