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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: Rising carnivore populations in Europe: Challenges for agriculture and rural areas
- Note from the Austrian delegation, supported by Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia

Delegations will find in the Annex a note to be presented by the Austrian delegation, supported by Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia under "Any other business" at the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 26 September 2022.

Rising carnivore populations in Europe: Challenges for agriculture and rural areas

Note from the Austrian delegation, supported by Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia

1. This year the Habitat Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) celebrates its 30th anniversary. It has been a milestone in protecting endangered flora and fauna in Europe and is a success story as an important pillar in improving biodiversity. In some Member States –predators had been eradicated for more than 100 years and have started to reappear just over a decade ago.
2. However, the recovering of certain protected carnivores has led to severe problems in the field of agriculture, forestry and aquaculture. Whereas society and land managers were used to the absence of the risks posed by these animals, the population is continuously growing and an increasing amount of livestock is currently being killed as a direct consequence.
3. In the field of mountain farming, the evolving threat of attacks of large carnivores is leading to more and more farmers either completely ending farming in mountain areas or feeling impelled to substantially shorten the grazing period. Though, keeping livestock in these particular valuable areas of natural constraints serve a variety of essential functions:
 - a) preventing the formation of woodland and scrub through extensive (alpine) pasturing and thereby safeguarding biodiversity rich agricultural land and cultural landscapes.
 - b) providing a significant and often one of the few sources of income in those regions, particularly for small and medium sized family farms.
 - c) maintaining an important source of high quality food production respecting animal welfare and contributing to food security.

4. Mountain farming is traditionally a central factor for vital rural areas and an essential element of functioning local and regional value chains. In these areas, the preservation of animal husbandry is the basis and precondition for food production, sustainable tourism and other sectors in the service and craft industry. Due to a rising number of large carnivores, the emerging decline of mountain farming must be swiftly addressed in order to consider the ecological, economic and social dimension of sustainability.
5. Large carnivores have widespread habitats that go beyond national borders. Definitions such as “good conservation status” must be scrutinized against this background based on scientific data and the amount of reproducing animals regardless of borders. Therefore, a harmonized and systematic European monitoring system is deemed necessary to gather accurate and up-to-date data of populations in order to define the “good conservation status”.
6. Herd protection is recognized as an important tool to facilitate the coexistence between large carnivores and mountain farming. However, the affiliated costs for technical barriers and personal are extremely high. These costs cannot be borne by farmers alone. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight that herd protection measures are not always suitable, technically limited or unfeasible due to topographical or other natural constraints or only available at disproportionately high costs.
7. With an estimated number of 17.000 individuals in continental Europe¹, the wolf population can exponentially increase by approximately 30% annually. Especially farmers are negatively affected by this development. Compared to 2020, livestock killings increased by 230% to 680 in 2021, in Austria alone. Similar development in the killing of livestock can also be observed in other Member States. However, not only wolves are affecting the farms and welfare of farmed animals. With more than 15.000 to 16.000 bears in the EU², the bear population is increasing and expanding more and more from Eastern to Western Member States.

¹ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/191585/IPOL_STU\(2018\)617488_EN%20AGRI-original.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/191585/IPOL_STU(2018)617488_EN%20AGRI-original.pdf) (2018)

² https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/conservation_status.htm

8. Within the last thirty years, circumstances have changed drastically. From an agricultural point of view, the current European regulatory framework has to be examined and adapted accordingly in order to tackle the very uncertain and aggravating situation.
9. Therefore, we urge the European Commission
 - a) to re-examine the situation whether and to what extent current legislation is suitable and practical to tackle the increasing threat of large carnivores and to conserve biodiversity rich agricultural land.
 - b) to foresee derogations from the strict protection regime and possible density regulation in the regions for certain most affected areas, where extensive farming traditionally plays a vital role (e.g. alpine farming) and herd protection measures are not feasible.
 - c) to propose a crossborder, comprehensive, and systematic monitoring system – particularly in the context of the “good conservation status”.
 - d) and without prejudice to the negotiations on the future MFF, to provide additional and adequate funding within and particularly outside the CAP for herd protection measures, monitoring systems and a compensation regime for farmers in the event of loss.