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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: Difficulties handling the populations of brown bears and wolves
- *Information from the Slovak delegation, supported by the Austrian,
Czech, Finnish, German and Romanian delegations*

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Slovak delegation, supported by the Austrian, Czech, Finnish, German and Romanian delegations on the difficulties handling the population of brown bears and wolves, to be addressed under "Any other business" items at the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 15 November 2021.

Difficulties handling the populations of brown bears and wolves

Information from the Slovak delegation supported by Austria, Czechia, Finland, Germany and Romania

Austria, Czechia, Finland, Germany, Romania and Slovakia would like to draw the Councils attention to the current situation of the population of brown bears and wolves (large carnivores). The AGRIFISH Council has dealt with this issue on some occasions already, most recently in April¹ and October² 2019.

The Habitats Directive requires Member States to take measures to protect biodiversity by maintaining or restoring the “favourable conservation status” of certain habitats and species to preserve biodiversity in the EU. Such measures have led in some Member States to a very strong national and regional population of large carnivores. Obviously, there are Member States and regions where large carnivore populations have yet to achieve the favourable conservation status. Large carnivore populations lead to conflicts with rural life and agriculture, which need to be assessed and dealt with. Other than the effect on tourism, large carnivores are also causing damages to agriculture, mainly to livestock farmers. The damages on livestock in the EU reach hundreds of thousands of euros yearly. Proper protection of herds may efficiently prevent damage. In mountain areas, there is a need for skilled shepherds with livestock guarding dogs as well as night pens and, especially in valleys, appropriate fences for the herds. Nevertheless, herd protection is not feasible in every case i.e. due to topographical reasons or disproportionate costs. Even if up to 100% of this economic damage can be compensated from the EU and national resources in most Member States, great challenges remain in coping with the damage for the livestock farmers. Some farmers even decided to stop their agricultural activity due to the persisting large carnivore attacks on their livestock, in certain EU Member States leading to not only the loss of work opportunities, but also to migration from rural areas to cities.

¹ Joint declaration of Denmark, Estonia, France, Italy and Latvia on wolf management, Council document st12888/19

² Impact of large carnivores and other species on agriculture, Council document st8392/19

Preventive measures to protect livestock against large carnivores are already available through the EAFRD and these measures should also be available in the CAP reform. In this regard, we call on the Commission to take into account these measures and to assess them equally to other environmental measures when evaluating the Strategic Plans. It also has to be noted, that the CAP should not be the only policy financing these measures.

Austria, Czechia, Finland, Germany, Romania and Slovakia are convinced that it is necessary to find long-term practical solutions and a consensus at the European level on the way forward. As there are various national interests at play, when it comes to the protection of large carnivores and also due to their migration a common European solution might ease the tension and provide a long-term remedy. However, in order to be able to find a solution, a thorough assessment of the various management approaches in the different Member States is needed, taking into account the entire population. The regional populations, which have grown significantly in some Member States, as well as the favourable conservation status of large carnivore populations that has not yet been achieved in other regions, must also be taken into account.

Since there are different surveying and monitoring methods used in Member States, we would see an exchange for greater harmonization of standards in the methods as a necessary first step.

Based on the aforementioned, Austria, Czechia, Finland, Germany, Romania and Slovakia would like to appeal on the Commission to assess the situation and the possibility to manage these issues on the European level.