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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Council
Subject:	The increasing population of large carnivores and the threat they represent for humans and animals – the need to take actions *- Information from the Romanian delegation, supported by the Czech and Slovak delegations*

Delegations will find in the Annex a note to be presented by the Romanian delegation, supported by the Czech and Slovak delegations, under "Any other business" at the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 26 and 27 June 2023.

ANNEX

The increasing population of large carnivores and the threat they represent for humans and animals – the need to take actions

1. The "Habitat" Directive 92/43 requires Member States to take measures in order to protect biodiversity by maintaining or restoring the "favorable conservation status" of certain habitats and species in order to preserve biodiversity in the EU. Such measures have led to a significant increase in the number of large carnivores in some member states. Currently, the most challenging for our farmers and rural areas are the bears and wolves.

2. The recovery of large carnivore populations has led to very serious problems in agriculture and forestry, culminating in some cases with injuring and even killing people. The numbers of wolves and bears have increased due to proper and consistent management measures implemented by Member States, but at the almost exclusive expense of our farmers. Therefore, the legal framework has to be reviewed in order to take into consideration the present status of the large carnivores in some of the EU Member States.

3. The damages caused to livestock and agricultural crops by bears and wolves is increasing year by year, leading more and more farmers to give up agricultural activities. The large areas of permanent pastures used for extensive grazing makes livestock a preferred target for large carnivores, and these attacks risk the abandonment of agricultural activities that contribute to the preservation of biodiversity of the agricultural lands, good management of rural areas, and the maintenance of population in rural areas. According to the EU legislation, Member States have committed to maintain the permanent pastures in good agricultural and environmental conditions, where farmers carry out extensive grazing activities.

4. As national borders do not limit the movement of large carnivores, it is necessary to re-assess the "favorable conservation status" of the wild species through a harmonized and systematic European monitoring system and to collect accurate and up-to-date data on carnivore populations. Hunting based on quotas is not incompatible with conservation efforts for bears/wolves as long as it is accompanied by monitoring in accordance with scientific standards and long-term management plans that ensure a "favorable conservation status."

5. Adequate protection of livestock can facilitate coexistence between large carnivores and extensive farming, but the costs involved in constructing technical barriers and hiring qualified guards are extremely high and cannot be borne solely by farmers. We have to find effective solutions together to prevent and reduce the increasing damages caused by carnivores, through compensation for the costs associated with carnivores-and through support for measures meant to avoid damages. It is important that such compensation schemes cover all categories of damages caused by wild species.

6. In Romania, farmers are affected mostly by bears, but also by wolves, because the number of bears increased a lot in the last decade, reaching between 7,000 and 8,000 individuals (compared to an optimal population of maximum 4,000 bears), accounting for about two-thirds of the bear population in Europe

7. For instance, in Romania the amount paid for damages between 2016 and 2022 exceeded 2,7 million euros with a maximum of 1,1 mil Euro in 2021, and a minimum of 2600 Euro in 2016, but they are far below the actual value of the damages incurred by farmers.

8. Socio-economic aspects are important, but when analyzing the management of the large carnivores, we must not overlook also the ecological effects. The reduction in the number of livestock farmers using permanent pastures leads to the loss of biodiversity and essential elements of the functioning of local and regional value chains, food production, sustainable tourism, and other sectors in the service industry and crafts. Considering all these problematic aspects, the current European regulatory framework needs to be re-examined and appropriately adapted to address the highly uncertain and worsening situation faced by agricultural producers and not only.

   Based on the aforementioned, we do consider it imperative to have greater flexibility in the "Habitat" Directive for managing the populations of large carnivores. Definitely, we have to continue conserving the large carnivores, but a fair balance must be established in relation to other species, including their prey, and we need to protect the people who increasingly fall victim to attacks by large carnivores.

We would like to ask the European Commission to:

a) analyze the current effects of the implementation of existing legislation and to what extent it remains adequate and practical in addressing the growing threats posed by large carnivores, while maintaining the conservation of biodiverse agricultural lands.

b) reclassify the respective species from Annex IV to Annex V of the "Habitat" Directive 92/43, which would facilitate the establishment of a correct number of large carnivores that should be correlated with the actual natural capacity to support these populations without endangering not only agricultural activities, but also the wild animal species that constitute their prey. This is especially crucial in areas where traditional extensive agriculture plays a vital role in maintaining exceptional biodiversity.

c) establish a systematic and efficient monitoring system, especially in the context of the "favorable conservation status".

d) provide adequate additional funding within and especially outside of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the measures aiming at protecting large carnivores, for monitoring systems, and for establishing an automatic compensation regime for farmers in case of losses.