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Directorate D – Biodiversity
ENV.D.3 – Nature Conservation

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ENV.D.3/MC/PP

Mr Ole Pedersen
Chairman
The association Ulvetid
E-mail: formand@ulvetid.dk

Subject: The downgrade of the protection of the wolf

Ref.: Your email of 19 February 2024 (Ares(2024)1263864)

Dear Mr Pedersen,

I am replying, on behalf of Commissioner Sinkevičius, to your email message of 19 February.

In your message, you express your opposition on behalf of the association Ulvetid, to the proposal to reduce the wolf's protection status. In particular, you state that the proposal would not be justified by any solid biological or scientific evidence.

The Commission's proposal of 20 December 2023 ⁽¹⁾ to change the wolf's protection status under the Bern Convention is based on the in-depth analysis on the situation of the wolf in the EU ⁽²⁾, that was finalised last December and carried out following the European Parliament resolution adopted on 24 November 2022 on the protection of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe ⁽³⁾.

This in-depth analysis shows that the populations of the wolf have significantly increased in the last two decades. Despite the well-known difficulties in monitoring and estimating the precise numbers of wolves, it appears clear that they have generally increasing populations and expanding ranges across all mainland EU Member States. The latest overall estimation indicates that there are today more than 20,000 wolves in the EU, with breeding packs in 23 EU Member States. Since the 2018 IUCN Red List assessments that you mention in your email, wolf populations in Europe have continued to expand and the further improvement of their conservation status was confirmed by the updated assessment carried out in 2022 and mentioned in the wolf analysis.

This is certainly a conservation success story, made possible by protective legislation, more favourable public attitudes and habitat improvements. However, this expansion of wolves has in parallel led to increasing conflicts with human activities, notably concerning livestock

⁽¹⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_6752

⁽²⁾ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5d017e4e-9efc-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-299076073>

⁽³⁾ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0423_EN.html

depredations, that have reached important levels, affecting more and more regions, both within EU Member States and non-EU Bern Contracting Parties.

In order to reflect this new situation, the Commission tabled a proposal for a Council Decision to adapt the protection status of the wolf under the under the international Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, to which the EU and its Member States are parties.

I would also like to clarify that a potential change of the protection status of the wolf under the Bern Convention, as proposed by the Commission, does not automatically change its protection status under the EU Habitats Directive. Only once the amendment of the Appendices of the Bern Convention (moving the wolf species from Appendix II to Appendix III) enters into force, the Union would be allowed to modify the corresponding Annexes of the Habitats Directive. The lowering of the wolf's protection status in EU legislation will thus depend on two key steps: first, a decision by the Council regarding the Commission's proposal and, second, the result of the relevant Standing Committee Meeting of the Bern Convention. Then, if both steps are positively completed, the Commission would be allowed to propose a possible targeted amendment of the EU Habitats Directive.

In addition, it is important to keep in mind that, in case the Commission proposal were accepted by the Council and by the Bern Convention Standing Committee, the wolf would remain a protected species under the Bern Convention. This means that all Contracting Parties will remain under an obligation to keep the populations out of danger and to continue to put in place appropriate measures to address the main threats to the species. Therefore, any hunting of such a species would need to be carefully regulated in order to keep the species out of danger, as required by Article 7(1) and (2) of the Bern Convention.

As regards livestock depredations, as stressed by the Commission on several occasions, it will be essential to keep investing in damage prevention measures in order to reduce as much as possible such losses, irrespective of any change in the level of legal protection of the wolf.

Finally, we believe that wolves are an important part of European ecosystems and we all have to work to improve the coexistence. This needs to be done also if the species becomes "protected" (and huntable) instead of "strictly protected".

The Commission will therefore continue its policy of support and promotion of coexistence measures through the relevant EU financial instruments and dedicated initiatives and – in a wider context – to support those stakeholders directly coping with the presence of large carnivores. Please refer to the following web page for any further information and for future updates on this topic: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/habitats-directive/large-carnivores_en.

I would like to thank you for your interest and engagement in the conservation of our natural heritage.

Yours sincerely,

Electronically signed
Andrea Vettori
Head of Unit