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**Protection of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe****European Parliament resolution of 24 November 2022 on the protection of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe (2022/2952(RSP))**

(2023/C 167/12)

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives’ (COM(2020)0380),
  - having regard to its resolution of 9 June 2021 on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives <sup>(1)</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 15 November 2017 on an Action Plan for nature, people and the economy <sup>(2)</sup>,
  - having regard to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive) <sup>(3)</sup>,
  - having regard to the Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats (the Bern Convention) <sup>(4)</sup>,
  - having regard to the Commission’s Regulatory Fitness and Performance Programme (REFIT),
  - having regard to Commission notice of 12 October 2021 entitled ‘Guidance document on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest under the Habitats Directive’ (C(2021)7301),
  - having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas in many parts of Europe an expansion of range or recolonisation by certain large predators including especially wolves and bears that have been absent from those territories for quite some time, which brings them into conflict with human activities, especially extensive grazing of sheep and cattle; whereas there are significant costs to pastoralists caused by depredation of their herds and the great disparity between Member States and regions in terms of measures, and in some cases a lack thereof, to support their farmers and public funds they make available for compensation and adaptation;
- B. whereas legislative action, such as the Habitats Directive and international treaties such as the Bern Convention, have contributed to the recovery of large carnivores including the grey wolf, the brown bear, the Eurasian lynx and the wolverine; whereas the number of large carnivores in continental Europe present in 2012 amounted to 9 000 Eurasian lynxes, 17 000 brown bears, 1 250 wolverines and 12 000 wolves; whereas the numbers for wolves have increased significantly in the last 10 years to 17 000, according to an assessment carried out in 2018 <sup>(5)</sup>, while the numbers for

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 67, 8.2.2022, p. 25.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 356, 4.10.2018, p. 38.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

<sup>(4)</sup> OJ L 38, 10.2.1982, p. 3.

<sup>(5)</sup> IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, ‘Canis lupus (Grey Wolf)’, accessed 23 November 2022.

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other species remain similar; whereas furthermore, based on best available data, in 2022, the total number of wolves in the EU-27 is likely to be in the order of 19 000 and is likely to exceed 21 500 in geographical Europe <sup>(6)</sup>; whereas in the last 10 years, an increase of over 25 % in wolf range has been reported in Europe according to a 2022 assessment of the conservation status of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) in Europe <sup>(7)</sup>; whereas the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has classified 3 out of 9 wolf populations, 3 out of 10 Brown bear populations and 3 out of 11 Eurasian lynx populations in Europe as least concern; whereas both wolverine populations in Europe remain threatened and the Iberian lynx is still endangered;

- C. whereas the wolf population has the potential to exponentially increase by approximately 30 % annually;
- D. whereas the negative impact of attacks on livestock by the growing wolf population is increasing; whereas wolves are coming into very close proximity to humans increasingly frequently, in particular in densely populated areas;
- E. whereas in Austria alone, the number of livestock killed by wolves increased by 230 % to 680 in 2021; whereas a similar development in wolf attacks can also be observed in other Member States, where in 2020 the number of livestock killed amounted to 11 849 in France, 3 959 in Germany, 616 in Czechia, 139 in Belgium and 98 in the South Tyrol region of Italy;
- F. whereas the rapid increase in the wolf population and in attacks on livestock makes it hard for national administrators to act effectively and decisively with the tools currently available to them;
- G. whereas faced with large carnivore attacks themselves, farmers are feeling desperate, misunderstood and powerless; whereas the attacks by large carnivores have already included human victims;
- H. whereas most populations of large carnivores in Europe are transboundary; whereas individual populations can cover large geographical ranges across different countries, within and outside of the EU, leading to situations where the same population in one region can be considered as being under favourable conservation status, while in a neighbouring region it can be classified as in need of strict protection;
- I. whereas monitoring approaches vary greatly, leading to inconsistent quality and quantity of data on large carnivore population levels;
- J. whereas the LIFE programme has already funded numerous projects to mitigate wildlife conflicts and promote long-term coexistence with large predators; whereas EUR 3,6 million per year on average were spent between 1992 and 2019 on projects focusing on large carnivore damage mitigation measures through the LIFE programme and a further EUR 36 million were granted for ongoing projects providing context-specific guidance on the effectiveness of mitigation measures such as electric fences, active shepherding and the use of livestock guarding dogs in many different regions of the EU; whereas there is a need for additional projects in regions and on large carnivore species that have not yet been addressed;
- K. whereas domesticated animals, particularly in pasture and open grazing systems, are put at higher risk of depredation (depending on the measures put in place and their effectiveness) by the growing presence of large carnivores; whereas this is especially true in mountainous and sparsely populated regions in which grazing is necessary to conserve these priority habitat; whereas in some densely populated areas with few of the natural prey species for large carnivores, there could also be a greater risk for domesticated animals;

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<sup>(6)</sup> Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe — Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission for the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, 'Assessment of the conservation status of the Wolf (*Canis lupus*) in Europe', 2 September 2022.

<sup>(7)</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/inf45e-2022-wolf-assessment-bern-convention-2791-5979-4182-1-2/1680a7fa47> Idem, p. 2.

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- L. whereas public attitudes to large carnivores vary widely across different countries and among various interest groups, in particular in regions where large carnivores have been absent for longer time spans; whereas the fear of attacks and lack of sufficient support from the authorities for avoiding damage might lead to the illegal killing of protected species;
- M. whereas the sheep and goat sectors, which are the most vulnerable to predator attacks from large carnivores, have already been under economic strain owing to wider socio-economic reasons for several decades; whereas this fragile sector can provide environmental added value through extensive grazing, by contributing to the maintenance of biodiversity in open landscapes in many areas with natural constraints or low fertility, such as alpine pastures, and by helping to combat phenomena such as erosion and forest fires;
- N. whereas traditional alpine pastures and meadow grazing systems are increasingly being abandoned as a result of environmental, agricultural and socio-economic challenges;
- O. whereas prevention measures to avoid conflicts of coexistence have been reported by LIFE projects in some EU regions as successful methods for reducing damage by large carnivores; whereas the effectiveness of these measures could, however, be affected by geographical circumstances and local conditions; whereas these measures may lead to increased labour and costs for farmers, especially in regions where large carnivores are returning or expanding their territory; whereas preventive measures to avoid conflicts of coexistence can be combined to increase effectiveness; whereas compensation payments, which are regulated at national level, differ within the EU and do not always achieve full compensation of the damage suffered;
- P. whereas the loss of, and injuries to, domesticated animals due to large carnivore attacks not only cause economic damage to farmers and breeders, but also have considerable emotional consequences for their owners;
- Q. whereas traditional livestock farming practices with high protection of livestock against predators such as the use of shepherds, livestock guarding dogs and night-time recovery to ensure the direct and continuous surveillance of grazing livestock have been used for centuries in Europe but have been gradually abandoned due to far fewer predator attacks; whereas it may prove difficult to return fully to these old practices on a large scale in some regions due to the land use change with a more multifunctional approach in agricultural areas, the increased importance of tourism and the current socio-economic pressure that farming is facing in the EU, with significant decreases in the numbers of farmers and below average wages; whereas innovative solutions will need to be found to accustom modern farming to the presence of wolves;
- R. whereas constructive coexistence between large carnivores and livestock farming is needed, whereby on the one hand, the conservation status of large carnivores could continue to develop favourably, while farmers would be given the tools and sufficient financing to address and prevent attacks on farm animals; whereas all management decisions should be based on science and sound data and should take into account ecological, social and economic perspectives; whereas further discussions will be needed between stakeholders and farmers in areas where large carnivores have been absent for decades, and further efforts will be needed in terms of the sharing of best practices to support the uptake of preventive measures and obtain access to financing; whereas the increased presence of large carnivores can have positive effects on ecosystem functioning and resilience, the conservation of biodiversity and ecological processes, contributing, inter alia, to regulating populations of wild ungulates; highlights also that, especially in national parks, the presence of large carnivores contributes to forests' recreational value and ever-increasing nature-based tourism;
- S. whereas in October 2021, the Commission issued new guidance on the strict protection of animal species under the Habitats Directive, including wolves, aimed at helping EU Member States to improve the implementation of the Habitats Directive on the ground, and especially to ensure the full, clear and precise transposition of Article 16 thereof;

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1. Notes the positive results of biodiversity policies with regard to the restoration of large carnivore species in the EU and notes their effects on ecosystem functioning and resilience, conservation of biodiversity and ecological processes, as well as livestock farming; stresses the importance of ensuring a balanced coexistence between humans, livestock and large carnivores, in particular in rural areas, and highlights the need to recognise that changes in population levels of certain species can lead to a number of environmental, agricultural and socio-economic challenges; recognises that Article 2(3) of the Habitats Directive already contains the flexibility to effectively address and manage these synergies and trade-offs and is considered fit for purpose; notes that these flexibilities should be explored further;
2. Deplores the impact that attacks by large carnivores have on animal welfare, including injuries, abortion, reduced fertility, loss of animals or entire herds, and the deaths of guard dogs, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to do their utmost to prevent suffering and damage to livestock animals;
3. Calls on the Commission to continue to assess progress in achieving the favourable conservation status for species on the basis of scientific evidence, in order to properly assess and monitor the population range and sizes of large carnivores, including their effects on nature and biodiversity; stresses the need to take into account the high cross-border mobility of species, as the conservation status of different populations of the same species can vary across regions; calls on the Commission and on the Member States to further intensify cross-border collaboration and stresses that monitoring should be coordinated through a harmonised methodology, taking into account transnational populations and (bio-)geographical regions, where applicable; calls on the Commission to earmark funds for biodiversity studies, for example under Horizon Europe, aimed at updating the distribution and density maps of large carnivores; calls on the Commission to ensure that Member States use appropriate monitoring methods for each of the different large carnivore species that allow for the compilation of high-quality, comparable and standardised data for an effective assessment of population levels;
4. Welcomes the fact that the item 'Proposal for amendment: Downlisting of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) from Appendix II to Appendix III of the Convention' has been included on the agenda of the 42nd meeting of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention; emphasises that the conservation status of the wolf at pan-European level justifies a mitigation of the protection status and consequently the adoption of the proposed amendment;
5. Recognises that large carnivore attacks are increasing across Europe, and have already claimed human victims and generated negative effects for livestock breeders; stresses the importance for Member States to also collect information and report on the damages resulting from large carnivore attacks; stresses that good monitoring of trends in damage occurrence for livestock breeders is a basic prerequisite for successful policies, yet the Member States use different surveying and monitoring methods; underscores the importance of standardised reporting formats, and underlines that this should apply equally to monitoring of the effectiveness of the damage mitigation programmes, including compensation and prevention; calls for the results of the monitoring and the methodology used to be made available to the public in a timely and transparent manner; highlights that the Commission should coordinate the data collection and perform the analyses;
6. Stresses the importance of improving wildlife health surveillance, in particular on dog-wolf hybridisation which should be proactively detected at an early stage; calls for a standardised policy for identifying hybrids and a transparent approach, including a generalised cross-border exchange of wolf DNA samples between research institutions;
7. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to assist regions facing coexistence conflicts to clarify how to make appropriate and responsible use of the flexibility that already exists under Article 16(1) of the Habitats Directive; takes note of the Commission's updated guidance document on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest under the Habitats Directive published on 12 October 2021 <sup>(8)</sup>; stresses that it is the responsibility of the Commission to clarify the existing guidelines and to keep its guidance up to date, where appropriate, including on the interpretation of Articles 12 and 16, and encourages the Member States to better use the existing guidelines and act in an effective way to prevent, mitigate and compensate the damages caused by large carnivores, considering transboundary populations, and to set an effective legal and institutional framework to support farmers and breeders to make this coexistence possible;

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<sup>(8)</sup> Commission notice of 12 October 2021 entitled 'Guidance document on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest under the Habitats Directive' (C(2021)7301).

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8. Calls on the Commission to carry out regular assessments of the scientific data to enable the protection status of species to be adapted as soon as the desired conservation status has been reached, in accordance with Article 19 of the Habitats Directive;

9. Urges the Commission and the Member States to organise opportunities for different stakeholders, including rural actors, to discuss the impacts of large carnivores; urges them to provide information on practical solutions and financing possibilities for preventive measures against attacks on livestock, and to conduct a clear awareness campaign; underlines the importance of developing stakeholder platforms on coexistence with large predators at EU, national and local level, such as the EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores, and of promoting dialogue, exchanging experience and cooperating to address conflicts between people and protected species; calls on the Commission to support the development of coordinated approaches across the Member States;

10. Calls on the Commission to report on the impact of the presence of large carnivores in Europe on the viability of livestock farming, biodiversity, rural communities and rural tourism, including generational renewal in agriculture, within the context of the socio-economic factors impacting the viability of livestock farming; calls on the Commission and the Member States to evaluate the impact that attacks by large carnivores have on animal welfare, as well as on farmers' well-being, incomes and higher labour and material costs, also taking into account whether or not preventive measures were implemented and how effective they were;

11. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop a solid and comprehensive assessment of all relevant threats and pressures on each species of large carnivores and their habitats at European level and in each Member State, either by natural causes or human induced factors; calls on the Member States and the Commission to also map priority connectivity areas for large carnivore populations and to identify the most important ecological corridors, dispersal barriers, high-mortality road sections and other important landscape features pertaining to the fragmented nature of large carnivore distribution in order to avoid habitat fragmentation;

12. Stresses that livestock farms in mountainous areas, including notably the Alpine region, are particularly vulnerable to increasing damages from large predators; points out that holdings in these regions are often small and face high additional costs and should be protected and encouraged as they can help to preserve mountain landscapes and safeguard biodiversity in inhospitable regions; points out that areas such as species-rich *Nardus* grasslands, on silicious substrates in mountain areas and alpine and subalpine calcareous grasslands are particularly worthy of conservation under the Habitats Directive; notes that these habitats have been created in the presence of wild predators and points out that a key factor for the conservation of those areas is extensive grazing, for example by bovines and horses or by shepherd-supervised flocks; calls on the Commission to protect and preserve traditional agricultural practices, such as pastoralism, the model of supervised grazing, the practice of transhumance recognised by UNESCO and the way of life of pastoral farmers, through concrete solutions; recognises that of these practices, certain ones can be covered by the proposed list of potential agriculture practices funded by eco-schemes;

13. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to recognise that the currently available preventive measures, including fences and guard dogs, which are successful in some EU regions, may present additional financial and labour burdens for farmers, are not always supported by EU or national funding and have a varying degree of efficiency and effectiveness depending on the local conditions<sup>(9)</sup> <sup>(10)</sup>; stresses, in this regard, that financial support for preventive measures should be accompanied by advisory support to ensure their comprehensive and timely implementation; highlights that the nature of the terrain, the geographical circumstances, the history of coexistence with large carnivores and other prevailing factors, such as tourism, which is often essential for the areas concerned, need to be taken into account when implementing preventive measures and when considering derogations; calls on the Commission and the Member States to recognise, in cases where populations of large carnivores are expanding, the importance of developing and implementing mitigation strategies proactively in line with the Habitats Directive, based on scientific evidence;

14. Calls on the Commission to regularly assess progress in achieving the conservation status for species at the level of biogeographical regions and/or EU-wide populations, and insists that the Commission develop an assessment procedure without delay to enable the protection status of populations in particular regions to be amended as soon as the desired conservation status has been reached, in accordance with Article 19 of the Habitats Directive;

<sup>(9)</sup> Cortés, Y. et al., 'A decade of use of damage prevention measures in Spain and Portugal', *Carnivore Damage Prevention News*, 2020.

<sup>(10)</sup> Oliveira, T. et al., 'The contribution of the LIFE program to mitigating damages caused by large carnivores in Europe', *Global Ecology and Conservation*, Vol. 31, 2021.

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15. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to scientifically identify and support the best feasible preventive measures to reduce attacks and the damage of the predation of livestock by large carnivores, taking into account the regional and local characteristics of the Member States, and to support farmers to apply for those preventive measures to multiply and scale up successful approaches; calls also for their effective inclusion in advisory and extension services; calls for an increase of LIFE funding for projects aimed at the achievement of coexistence with large carnivores while upholding funding for the protection of species; calls for the prioritising of small-scale projects, aimed at sharing and developing best practices on coexistence with large predators, and calls on the Commission to define appropriate requirements for measuring and reporting the effectiveness of damage mitigation measures investigated in projects funded by the EU, such as through the LIFE programme, giving priority to objective and quantitative assessment methods;

16. Calls on the Member States to draw up and implement comprehensive species action plans or conservation and/or management plans, where none are already in place, taking into account human densities, landscape structures, livestock herding, conservation status, other relevant human activities and wild ungulate populations;

17. Highlights the need for a regular monitoring of large carnivore populations in order to strategically plan conservation actions, to apply preventive schemes to reduce conflicts and to evaluate the results of all the actions; remarks that monitoring should be based on a robust methodology, should promote and facilitate the participation of different stakeholders and that its results should be regularly communicated to society and the main stakeholder groups;

18. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to identify adequate and long-term funding opportunities for appropriate preventive measures and adequate compensation for farmers not only for any losses suffered and costs incurred as a result of large carnivore attacks, but also for the mitigation measures implemented, in order to ensure the coexistence of large carnivores and sustainable livestock farming practices; stresses that compensation schemes, designed in such a way that livestock farming and the presence of large carnivores does not mean a profit loss for farmers, should cover direct and indirect costs associated with predator attacks, and should be integrated with preventive measures for greatest efficiency; highlights the importance of fairly and comprehensively compensating for any losses of farm animals caused by large carnivores, including hybrid species; calls on the Member States and regions to improve access to financial compensation; calls on the Commission to recognise that the rising number of attacks by large carnivores means that the resources devoted to protecting domesticated animals and paying out compensation are also increasing; regrets that the compensation paid to livestock breeders after an attack varies from Member State to Member State; calls on the Commission to consider amending its agricultural guidelines to facilitate compensation for damage by large predators as State aid;

19. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission and the Council.

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