



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Ursula von der Leyen  
The President

Brussels, **25. 11. 2022**  
Ares (2022) 6913046

*Honourable Members,*

*Thank you very much for your letter of 6 October 2022 in which you highlight important issues relating to the protection of wolf species under Union law.*

*In your letter, you draw the attention of the Commission to the fact that farming communities in the Union, and in particular in the Alps, have seen an increase of attacks by wolves on livestock, causing considerable damages. You furthermore note that the conflicts between human communities in the mountains and wolves have been rapidly escalating, leading to risks for desertification of the regions concerned and the abandonment of livestock farming. For these reasons, you consider that this problem has to be urgently addressed and you call upon the Commission to initiate a revision of the Habitats Directive <sup>1</sup>, so that wolves are no longer strictly protected.*

*The Commission has examined your concerns with utmost attention. Indeed, under the Habitats Directive, most wolf populations in the Union enjoy strict protection, with derogation possibilities. This regime implements the requirements under international law of the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, to which the Union and the Member States are parties, and which currently provides for the strict protection of wolves.*

*The Commission acknowledges that the return of wolves to regions of the Union in which they have been absent for a long time and their growing populations in new territories lead to challenges and certain conflicts, such as attacks on livestock and risks for the local population.*

*We understand that this raises questions as to whether the protection status of wolves should be reviewed. Changes to the protection regime require a comprehensive examination of all available scientific and technical data, and all other relevant circumstances at hand. I have also taken good note of the figures mentioned in the European Parliament resolution of 24 November 2022 on the protection of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe, and I welcome the interest expressed by the European Parliament in this topic, through this resolution.*

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<sup>1</sup> Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

*I have accordingly instructed the services of the Commission to carry out an in-depth analysis. In this regard, I invite you to also share with the Commission the elements at your disposal, on the basis of which you indicate that the wolf species is no longer endangered in Europe, so that they could be taken into account as part of this assessment.*

*At the same time, let me underline that within the current framework of the Habitats Directive, Member States do enjoy considerable possibilities to derogate from the prohibitions of the strict protection regime.*

*Article 16 of the Directive allows Member States to enact derogations in order to prevent serious damage (in particular to crops, livestock, forests, fisheries and water and other types of property), in the interests of public health and public safety. It also allows this for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature, or in order to allow, under strict conditions, the taking or keeping of certain specimens of the species enjoying strict protection in limited numbers specified by the competent national authorities.*

*In other words, the existing rules on derogations make it possible to balance different interests against the conservation aims of the Directive. The Directive thus authorises Member States to take action to derogate to its provisions in order to address the specific challenges they are currently facing in relation to the wolf population. In this context, Member States have at their disposal the appropriate means to address local conflicts and circumstances, in line with the principle of subsidiarity. The Commission is kept informed of such measures but will not stand in the way of Member States making use of the various derogation possibilities offered to them under the terms and conditions of the Directive.*

*Finally, let me reassure you that the Commission is fully aware of this important matter and will continue to closely follow this sensitive file.*

*Yours faithfully,*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ursula von der Leyen', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ursula von der Leyen