



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
ENVIRONMENT
Directorate D – Biodiversity
ENV.D.3 – Nature Conservation

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ENV.D.3/

Professor Luigi Boitani
Chair of the Large Carnivore
Initiative for Europe
luigi.boitani@uniroma1.it

John Hechtel
IBA President
john.hechtel@bearbiology.org

Subject: Bear management in Slovakia

Ref.: your letter of 15 November 2024 Ares(2024)8165668

Dear Professor Boitani and Mr Hechtel,

Executive Vice-President Šefčovič would like to thank you for the letter you addressed to him about bear management in Slovakia. He asked me to reply on his behalf.

The Commission assessed the Slovak Act No. 127/2024 Coll. that you refer to in your letter. The act amends both the Civil Protection Act and the Nature Act and makes it possible to issue derogations to cull bears outside the standard administrative procedure which had been used previously. While municipalities and NGOs lost the possibility to be involved in the proceedings and lodge an administrative appeal, access to justice is still ensured as a decision to grant a derogation can be challenged in court.

The absence of another economically and technically feasible alternative to issuing a derogation to cull the individual of a strictly protected species still must be considered. Also, the granting of a derogation must not jeopardise the favourable status of the population of the species concerned in its natural range. Thus, both these conditions set by Article 16 of the Habitats Directive for issuing derogations remain in place.

Thus, the Commission concluded that the new act is largely in compliance with the Habitats Directive though its application will confirm whether this is the case.

While preventive measures are key for minimizing conflicts between humans and bears the act makes only a single reference to prevention. The Commission stressed the importance of preventive measures in a technical meeting with the Slovak authorities in June 2024.

As you note in your letter the bear is in a favourable conservation status in Slovakia. According to the latest available data⁽¹⁾, the population and range of brown bears in Slovakia are still increasing. Data and assessments of conservation status for the period 2019-2024 will be reported by Member States by July 2025. Meanwhile, the Commission will keep closely monitoring the situation of the bear in Slovakia and continue the dialogue with the national authorities so that the requirements of the Habitats Directive are respected.

Yours sincerely,

(e-signature)

Andrea Vettori
Head of Unit

(¹) <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/3f466d71-92a7-49eb-9c63-6cb0fadf29dc/library/97829710-878b-4bf7-95a1-f135b00dd8f7/details>