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President
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Open letter: Rural communities' support for grey wolf protection should be considered by the Commission when assessing the species' protection status.

Brussels, 4th December 2023

Dear President,

On behalf of the undersigned animal protection organisations, we are writing in connection with the [press release](#) dated 4 September 2023, which encouraged national authorities to use derogations to manage grey wolves (*Canis lupus*) and announced a consultation to inform the European Commission's decision-making on the assessment of the protection status of grey wolf populations under the Habitats Directive.

We are concerned that the discussion of this issue has so far been largely dominated and driven by farming industry and hunting interest representatives, who are keen to position themselves as speaking on behalf of rural communities. While the reality is that **there is actually a high degree of support among rural communities for the strict protection of grey wolves in the EU.**

Moreover, we would like to emphasise that rural communities, which are often directly affected by these policies, are unanimous in accepting the presence of grey wolves as an essential part of Europe's natural ecosystems. **We therefore call for the voices of all rural citizens to be heard and taken into account in the development of EU policies, as set out in the Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas.**

The undersigned organisations commissioned an [independent survey](#), which was carried out in November 2023. The survey examined the attitudes of **10,000 inhabitants of rural areas** in ten Member States (Germany, France, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Poland, Denmark, Sweden and Romania) with respect to coexistence with large carnivores.

73% of respondents believe that large carnivores have the right to exist in the EU and 68% call for large carnivores to remain strictly protected. It is important to note that only 9% of the respondents stated that large carnivores should not be strictly protected.

66% emphasise that decision-makers, including EU institutions, should prioritise the conservation of large carnivores. More broadly, the survey identified environmental protection for future generations (80%) and the conservation of biodiversity (78%) as important priorities for the European Union.

A significant majority (65%) believe that the killing of individual problematic large carnivores should only take place if it has been proven that adequate protection measures have been implemented and have failed. The same proportion (68%) also call for public authorities to fully fund farmers so that they can put in place and maintain protection measures for their animals. This is especially relevant in light of the **body of evidence showing the inefficiency of lethal control compared to coexistence measures**. New [findings](#) from Slovakia consolidate previous scientific research demonstrating that there is no correlation between the number of wolves killed and depredation on farmed animals.

These figures demonstrate that, contrary to some perceptions, residents of rural areas are very much in favour of protecting wolves. Many individuals in these communities recognise the ecological and socio-economic benefits of wolves, and are willing to coexist with them. **The conservation of wolves is vital for maintaining ecological balance and biodiversity. Wolves play a crucial role in regulating prey populations, preventing overgrazing, and ultimately contributing to healthier ecosystems.** Importantly, 68% of respondents expressed the wish that the benefits and functions provided by large carnivores should be taken into account in decisions relating to their management.

In conclusion, we urge you to factor the strong and growing support for wolf conservation in rural communities into the current assessment of the protection status of grey wolves and into future policies. By doing so, we can achieve a harmonious coexistence between humans and wolves, preserving our natural heritage for future generations.

Yours sincerely,

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