

Brussels, 19 June 2026
(OR. en)

10329/26

AGRI 468
AGRIFIN 115
ENV 693

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: AOB item for the meeting of the “Agriculture and Fisheries” Council
on 22-23 June 2026:
Greater flexibility in the strict conservation regime applicable to the bear
population, in light of the current duly justified situation
*- Information from Romania and Slovakia, supported by Croatia, Czechia
and Finland*

On the map of European biodiversity, Romania and Slovakia continue to hold a leading position. However, the 2026 figures reveal a significant imbalance: more than half of Europe's entire bear population is located in Romania and Slovakia, although the countries' forests account for only 5.5% of the continent's total forest area.

Population data and conservation status

Current bear population is officially estimated at approximately **11,500 individuals** in Romania and at least **2,500 individuals** in Slovakia. The species has a favourable conservation status, while the optimum population level from both an ecological and public-safety perspective for Romania's approximately 70,000 km² of suitable habitat is around 4,000 individuals, while in Slovakia the same figure amounts to 800 individuals. The current population therefore **exceeds this level by almost threefold**.

Public safety concerns

Over the past five years, bear attacks in Romania have resulted in **14 deaths** (an average of two to three deaths per year) and **more than 150 people being seriously injured**, while the cumulative number of emergency calls reporting the presence of bears or bear attacks has exceeded 30,000. Official data show that half of the 27 deaths reported over the past two decades occurred in the recent period. More than 274 people have survived bear attacks with serious long-term injuries.

In Slovakia, over the past five years, bear attacks have resulted in **4 deaths** and **64 people being seriously injured**. Official data show that all human deaths caused by brown bears in Slovakia occurred in the recent period and were not present before. Since the year 2000 more than 130 people have survived bear attacks with serious long-term injuries.

Socioeconomic considerations

The agricultural sector has also been severely affected economically due to both livestock losses and farmers being unable to carry out their activities under normal conditions in areas affected by bears. In Romania, between 2024 and 2026 alone, **1,806 domestic animals, including horses, cattle, sheep, goats and pigs, were killed by large carnivores, particularly bears**. Additional more than **500 domestic animals** were killed by brown bears in Slovakia between 2023 and 2025. Farmers in the crop-production sector also suffer significant material losses due to **bear damage to arable crops, orchards and vineyards**.

The additional expenditure incurred by farmers to implement protective measures aimed at reducing damage must not be overlooked. Such measures include electric fences, monitoring systems, protective equipment, additional labour and guard dogs. Farmers also face indirect costs, including the adaptation of crops, technologies and agricultural activities, as well as additional administrative costs.

Over the past ten years, the Romanian state has recorded a sharp increase in the amounts claimed as compensation, **from approximately EUR 150,000 in 2014 to more than EUR 2.5 million in 2025**. A gradual increase was also recorded in Slovakia, rising **from approximately EUR 75,000 in 2020** with a peak in **2023 to nearly EUR 550,000**. The conservation of Europe's brown bear population therefore generates costs borne mainly by local communities and the Romanian and Slovak state budgets, although the benefits of conservation are recognised throughout the European Union.

Policy implications

Given the available information on the species' distribution, the biology, ecology and ethology of the brown bear, the existing regulatory framework and the framework for population monitoring and assessment, **brown bear population of Romania and Slovakia is currently expanding rapidly. As an apex predator with no natural predators of its own, the species urgently requires effective management.**

Such management must pursue not only ecological objectives, namely maintaining brown bear populations at a favourable conservation status, **but also social and economic objectives designed to limit human-wildlife conflict**. These include reducing human casualties and damage, ensuring social acceptance and safeguarding public safety.

In the specific circumstances of Romania and Slovakia, effective management must clearly encompass not only the management of habitats and movement corridors, but also **population density control as a management tool aimed at reducing human-bear conflict and maintaining acceptable levels of social and economic risk**.

In view of the growth of the brown bear population, the achievement and maintenance of favourable conservation status and the associated social and economic costs, Romania and Slovakia call on the European Commission to **recognise that, as Member States, they bear a disproportionate share of the responsibilities, costs and risks associated with conserving the European population of this species**.

The maintenance of favourable conservation status should be assessed not only in terms of population size, but also in terms of the management system's capacity to ensure sustainable coexistence between people and the species.

We also call for the following:

- **Clarification of the application of Article 16 of the Habitats Directive** to populations of large carnivores that have achieved and maintained a favourable conservation status over the long term, including with regard to the use of management measures aimed at reducing human-wildlife conflict and maintaining acceptable levels of social and economic risk.
- Recognition of scientifically grounded control of brown bear population density, implemented while maintaining favourable conservation status, as a legitimate management tool in areas characterised by high levels of human-bear conflict, and **a shift from a regime based on individual derogations to a permanent management regime similar to that applicable under Annex V.**
- The initiation of a **European process to assess greater flexibility in the protection and management framework applicable to brown bear populations** that have achieved and maintained a favourable long term conservation status over.

In 2024, the EU acknowledged, **through the amendment of the wolf's protection regime**, that management instruments for large carnivores must be adapted when conservation objectives have been achieved and significant social and economic costs arise. The arguments underpinning that decision focused primarily on damage to livestock and the economic losses borne by farmers. In Romania and Slovakia, however, the situation caused by bears is considerably more serious, as the consequences are not limited to material damage but also include **attacks on people resulting in fatalities and bodily injuries**. The associated economic costs and, above all, the **impact on public safety** far exceed the scale of the damage caused by wolves at European level that led to the amendment of their protection regime.

Romania and Slovakia call for a similar approach to be applied to the brown bears in those Member States that have achieved and maintained a favourable conservation status over the long term. This is to ensure that a reasonable and balanced level of social and economic risk is maintained.