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Subject: Impact of large carnivores and other species on agriculture

Delegations will find in the Annex a background paper prepared by the Presidency in view to the lunch discussion at the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 15 April 2019.



MINISTERUL AGRICULTURII
ȘI DEZVOLTĂRII RURALE



Council of Ministers

15th of April 2019

Lunch debate – impact of large carnivores and other species on agriculture

Introduction

The importance of Natura 2000 network established under Habitats and Birds Directives for preserving and restoring of certain endangered species and habitats throughout the EU is well acknowledged. Due to the significant and continuous efforts of the farming and forestry sectors, the return of many previously endangered species appears to be a conservation success. In Europe, the status of large carnivores varies widely depending on region and species. The reactions of local communities towards them are divergent and cover the whole spectrum: from fear to enthusiasm.

However, this success story did not occur without raising significant socio-economic issues and many protected species are perceived as a danger not only for animal holdings in mountainous and pre-mountainous areas, but also for human settlements. The farming sector encounters problems in certain regions while, at the same time, co-existence with prominent species such as the wolf, the brown bear, the jackals, the wolverine, beaver, certain geese species, the great cormorant and other birds protected under Natura 2000 network, requires a constructive approach. Also, the wild boar is producing important damages to farmers.

Main concerns

Many member states are confronted with a rural exodus. Among the main problems related to the rural area depopulation the difficult co-existence with large carnivores is cited. It leads to decreased local production and abandoned pasture lands. The traditional pastoralism, biodiversity and local economies are put at risk and millions of euros are spent annually from agricultural funds to compensate for damage and ineffective protection measures.



The image of large carnivores is both emblematic and demonized. Especially in mountainous areas, sometimes bears and wolves attack both people and domestic animals, inducing fear and affecting the traditional way of living.

Also, in the specific areas where fishing is practiced, the fish eating birds (like the great cormorant) compete with the fishermen, causing economic damage to related business. Farmers have abandoned much of their aquaculture activity, affecting economically and socially important areas where fish farming has traditionally been the only source of income and thus putting more pressure on the natural resources. If in the past these birds were in danger, now the fish stocks are in dangers, many fish species having disappeared in the last decades.

Member states also face huge damage to grain crops due to wild boar, which is also a vector of pathogens diseases that endanger the health of domestic animals. As it is known, in 2018 the pig breeding sector recorded very high losses due to African swine fever, one of the vectors spreading the disease being the wild boar. Even if this species is not subject of the Habitats Directive, we see potential for more coordinated measures at the EU level to control the wild boar population.

In the light of the above mentioned concerns, agriculture ministers are invited to give their opinion on the following possible measures in order to protect the interests of farmers and the agricultural sector while preserving biodiversity:

- *Active management of populations* - With their increasing number large carnivores have become in certain areas a potential threat to rural communities and the livestock sector;
- *Enhanced dialogue between conservationists and farmers*, doubled by concrete administrative measures to ensure protection of rural communities and species. There is a need for opening discussions on efficient management of large carnivores, cormorants and other species. Effective and targeted use of the derogations provided for in the Directives should be pursued in order to prevent serious damage to animals, crops, fisheries, forestry and in the interest of public health and public safety
- *Compensation and impact assessment* - Damages resulting from conflicting species translate into loss of animals, loss of production and additional labor costs through damage management. Better ways need to be identified in order



to provide compensation for all direct and indirect costs arising to farmers due to the conservation and restoration of conflicting species protected under the above mentioned directives.

- *Preserving of biodiversity* - Pasture farming, which has evolved over the centuries, is an important ecological and cultural asset and should be maintained. In many regions, the threat represented by large carnivores has already determined the rural areas abandonment by population. Livestock grazing and pastoral farming play an essential role in preserving biodiversity and protecting species.
- *Identification of the best solutions to address the co-existence* taking into consideration the views of all stakeholders. Livestock farming must continue in the future, while considering the appropriate measures to recover endangered species and maintain species balance.