



PRESS RELEASE

FACE: EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF ASSOCIATIONS FOR HUNTING & CONSERVATION

FACE welcomes MEPs acknowledging the problem of human-wolves conflicts

As conflicts between wolves and humans are increasing in many EU countries due to growing wolf populations, the Intergroup “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” held a conference yesterday in the European Parliament, seeking to better understand the challenges and solutions to this situation.

Brussels, September 16, 2015 – During the Conference “The Return of the Wolf to the European Landscape: Challenges and Solutions”, the Intergroup “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” heard several presentations from different countries about wolf conflicts and the challenges arising from their growing populations into new territories.

The growing numbers of wolves are increasingly resulting in conflicts, such as attacks to livestock, prompting some Member States to call on the European Commission to review their legal status under the Habitats Directive. Article 19 of the Habitats Directive makes provision to adapt the legal status of protected species to technical and scientific progress, but has never been applied. Communities in remote areas and whose livelihoods are affected by wolves are calling on policy-makers to take stock of a daunting situation and adopt measures for the sustainable governance of wolf populations at regional level.

A compelling case study was presented by Helmut DAMMAN-TAMKE, President of the Hunting Association of Lower Saxony, who described the situation in Germany, where wolves, previously absent for more than a century, are now increasing their population at a yearly rate of 30%. Germany’s modern landscape with densely populated areas faces the challenge of balancing nature protection obligations and people’s acceptance of wolves. He called on EU policy-makers to review the protection status of wolves considering their improved population status and the need to adopt management measures taking into account the behaviour of habituated individuals.

Other presentations, such as the one by Semi NIEMI, Adviser at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland and Jozef DOCZY, Director Department of Forestry and Hunting, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, focused on illustrating the experiences in management methods adopted in countries such as Finland and Slovakia aimed at reducing human-wolf conflict.

Everyone agreed that effective management and conflict resolution need sound and objective scientific underpinning. Scientific clarity about the behaviour, risks, population status, threats and all other related aspects is essential for any informed debate on the matter. This point was stressed by Stefan LEINER, Head of the Biodiversity Unit, Acting Director for Natural Capital, DG Environment, European Commission, who speaking on the positive results in terms of the comeback of endangered species in Europe, said that “the most challenging issue is the return of large carnivores into areas where they have been absent for hundreds of years. Among these species the wolf is the one whose return has resulted in the most severe conflicts.”

Karl-Heinz Florenz, President of the Intergroup said: “Wolves are welcome, but a peaceful coexistence requires coordinated and reasonable management, which takes into account the needs and interests of the local people. How this can be achieved is the main question.”

In his closing remarks, MEP Bendt BENDTSEN, who chaired the conference stated: “The growing wolf population and its geographical spread is new in Europe. As a policy-maker, it is my belief that wolves must be monitored to gather fact-based grounds upon which to make our decisions. I believe that the wolf population should be regulated on a pan-European level, and as a Member of the European Parliament, I am of the opinion the Habitats Directive should be reviewed to allow a better regulation of the wolves”.

According to the last report, under the Habitats Directive the wolf population in the EU is estimated to be at around 10,000 individuals (2007-2012), with most populations being stable or increasing. In the same report, Favourable Conservations Status was achieved in 58% of individual assessments at Member State level, while 33% were considered ‘Unfavourable-inadequate’, and 9% as ‘Unfavourable-bad’.

Dr. Julien ALLEAU from the Centre de Recherche d’Histoire Quantitative of the Caen University referred to Macedonia and Finland where “the relationship between humans and wolves are less conflictual as their populations have remained present for a long period.” This demonstrates that coexistence between humans and wolves is possible where management measures are in place.

Emmanuel COSTE from Europe’s farmers’ association COPA-COGECA, which abandoned talks with the European Commission on human-large carnivores conflicts earlier this year, represented the view of the livestock breeders saying that European policy-makers should better recognise the needs faced by this industry, which is confronted with increasing attacks and damages due to the strong adaptive capacity of wolves to modern farming practices.



Background

The Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside Intergroup was created in 1985 and is one of the oldest and most active in the Parliament. Since 1985, The Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation (FACE) provides the Secretariat for the Intergroup. The Intergroup works on issues for which the European Parliament is competent in the fields of biodiversity, hunting, angling, wildlife management, forestry, agriculture and nature conservation, taking into account the public and wild animal health and welfare. The Intergroup also addresses cross-cutting issues which have an impact on socio-economic activities in rural areas.

In May 1992, under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, the grey wolf (*Canis Lupus*) was given the status of strictly protected species, banning its intentional killing due to its critically endangered status. Since 1992 the population has greatly increased and has not been at threat of extinction since 2009. In spite of its recovery, the legislation has not been changed.

FACE also has 5 Associate Members and has its Secretariat in Brussels. FACE upholds the principle of sustainable use, has been a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since 1987, and more recently of Wetlands International. FACE works with its partners on a range of hunting-related issues, from international conservation agreements to local implementations with the aim of sustaining hunting across Europe. In this regards we are also partly funded by the LIFE Grant of the European Commission.

FACE does not support the re-opening of the Habitat Directive.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS:

FACE is the European Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation.

Established in 1977, FACE represents the interests of Europe's **7 million hunters** as an international non-profit-making nongovernmental organization (NGO).

FACE is made up of its **Members: national hunters' associations** from **35 European countries** including the EU-28. FACE also has 4 Associate Members and has its Secretariat in Brussels.

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