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THE BERN CONVENTION AND THE PROTECTION OF THE WOLF - FAQ

WHAT IS THE BERN CONVENTION?

The Bern Convention, formally the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (ETS No. 104), is an international treaty of the Council of Europe in the field of nature conservation, covering most of the natural heritage of the European continent and extending to some States of Africa.

It was opened for signature on 19 September 1979 and entered into force on 1st June 1982.

WHICH ARE THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION? ARE ALL MEMBERS OF THE EU PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION?

There are 50 contracting Parties to the Bern Convention. All the Council of Europe member States except one, San Marino, have ratified the Convention. This includes all the EU countries. The EU, as such, is also a Party to the Convention, as well as four African states: Burkina Faso, Morocco, Senegal and Tunisia.

HOW DOES THE BERN CONVENTION PROTECT THE WOLF CURRENTLY?

The wolf (*Canis lupus*) is listed in [Appendix II](#) of strictly protected fauna species. That implies that wolves should not be deliberately killed, captured, kept or disturbed, in particular during the period of breeding and rearing; and their breeding sites should not be damaged or destroyed (Article 6).

Article 9 of the Convention stipulates that exceptions may be acceptable in duly justified circumstances, such as preventing serious damage to crops, livestock, forests etc. or in the interest of public health and safety, or other overriding public interests, if there is no other satisfactory solution and the survival of the population concerned is not at stake.

When ratifying the Bern Convention, 12 countries¹ made [reservations](#), implying that they would not consider the wolf as a strictly protected species.

The Bern Convention monitors breaches of the Convention based on complaints which can be submitted by the states Parties, NGOs or individuals. There are two pending cases relating to wolves: [file No. 2022/03](#) against Norway and [file No. 2023/03](#) against Switzerland.

WHAT HAS THE EU PROPOSED?

On 27 September 2024 the EU submitted a proposal to move the wolf (*Canis lupus*) from Appendix II to Appendix III of the Bern Convention, i.e. from “strictly protected fauna species” to “protected fauna species” thus lowering the degree of protection (See the [EU proposal](#)).

How precisely? Appendix II is covered by Article 6 which prohibits in particular: all forms of deliberate capture and keeping and deliberate killing; the deliberate damage to or destruction of breeding or resting sites; the deliberate disturbance of wild fauna, particularly during the period of breeding, rearing and hibernation, insofar as disturbance would be significant in relation to the objectives of the Convention; and the possession of and internal trade in these animals, alive or dead, including stuffed animals and any readily recognisable part or derivative thereof, where this would contribute to the effectiveness of the provisions of this article.

¹ Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Türkiye.

Appendix III is covered by Article 7 which provides that any exploitation of wild fauna shall be regulated in order to keep the populations out of danger and that measures to be taken shall include: closed seasons and/or other procedures regulating the exploitation; the temporary or local prohibition of exploitation, as appropriate, in order to restore satisfactory population levels; and the regulation as appropriate of sale, keeping for sale, transport for sale or offering for sale of live and dead wild animals.

WHO WILL DECIDE AND WHEN?

The decision on the proposed amendment by the EU will be taken by the [Standing Committee](#) which is the governing body of the Bern Convention. It is composed of representatives of the Parties to the Convention, with the right to vote, and of observers with no right to vote. The Committee meets once a year and the next meeting will be in Strasbourg on 2-6 December 2024. The meetings are closed. Meeting reports are made public a few weeks after the meeting.

The proposed amendment will be examined by the Standing Committee, which may adopt it by a two-thirds majority of the Parties (i.e. 34).

IS THIS FINAL?

No. If adopted, the proposed amendment will be forwarded to the Parties by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and will enter into force three months after its adoption by the Standing Committee unless one-third of the Parties (i.e. 17) object, in which case it will fall and will not enter into force. If that is not the case and the amendment enters into force, it will enter into force for those parties which have not objected.

HOW MANY VOTES DOES THE EU HAVE IN THE BERN CONVENTION SYSTEM?

According to Article 13.2 of the Bern Convention the EU has a number of votes equal to the number of its member States which are Contracting Parties to this Convention i.e. 27. The EU does not have an additional vote as there is no possibility of additionality.

WERE THERE SIMILAR CASES CONCERNING THE WOLF BEFORE?

In 2022 Switzerland proposed to downgrade the protection status of the wolf from Appendix II to Appendix III. The proposal was examined and rejected by the Standing Committee (See [report](#), item 5.2).

WERE THERE OTHER CASES CONCERNING OTHER SPECIES BEFORE?

In 2019, Norway proposed to downgrade the protection status of the Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) from Appendix II to Appendix III. The proposal was examined and rejected by the Standing Committee (see [report](#), item 4.2).

WHAT IS THE SITUATION OF THE WOLF POPULATION?

- [The situation of the wolf \(*Canis lupus*\) in the European union: An in-depth analysis \(2023\)](#)
- [Facts about wolves in Europe \(WWF, 2023\)](#)
- [Assessment of the conservation status of the Wolf \(*Canis lupus*\) in Europe \(2022\)](#)

More resources

[Text of the convention, Parties and other Bern Convention website](#)
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