



**“THE EU INITIATIVE ON DOWNGRADING THE PROTECTION STATUS OF THE WOLF (CANIS LUPUS): LEGAL AND SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS: WHY EU MEMBER STATES SHOULD NOT DOWNGRADE THE PROTECTION STATUS OF THE WOLF IN NATIONAL LEGISLATION” - 10 MARCH 2026**

**Key points from the WolfWatch Europe webinar**

**Institutional process of downgrading:** The wolf (*Canis lupus*) was downgraded from a strictly protected species to a simply protected species under the Bern Convention (December 2024) and the Habitats Directive (June 2025); EU Member States have 18 months (until 2027) to decide on national transposition (which is not mandatory).

**1) Lack of scientific basis:** There are no reliable and consistent data at European level to support the downgrading of the wolf in Europe; this presupposes the achievement of a stable Favourable Conservation Status for the species, which is unfounded, not least because the 34 European countries (Bern Convention area) use 24 different monitoring methods, producing non-comparable results and making a reliable assessment of conservation status impossible. The downgrading applies uniformly across the whole of Europe, ignoring the biological differences between wolf populations; there is no single ‘European’ *Canis lupus* population. Each country uses monitoring procedures that differ from all the others, with many methods not used at all. Countries such as Kosovo and Albania use only approximate methods, such as expert opinion. Italy, France and Germany use more reliable methods, but these are still insufficient for accurate assessments. The uniform application of the downgrade is problematic given the biological heterogeneity. Some populations are already at risk, and the downgrade exacerbates the situation. A rigorous scientific approach based on reliable data is required.

**2) Attacks: a myth.** The likelihood of fatal wolf attacks in Europe has been **zero** in recent decades. In Italy, nine wolves exhibiting aggressive behaviour towards people have been documented over an 18-year period – roughly half a wolf per year. The documented cases mainly concern wolves accustomed to human contact, pups kept as pets and then released, or wolves fed by humans. This inappropriate behaviour has been conditioned by inappropriate interactions with humans. There is no scientific evidence to demonstrate that wolves are dangerous to humans. The risks to human safety are unjustified and undocumented.

**3) Wolf expansion:** There is ecological space for the expansion of wolf populations. Wolves play an important role as biological regulators of ecosystems

**4) Pending legal appeals:** Three appeals have been lodged with the European Court of Justice by various associations to overturn the reclassification within the EU; currently in the written pleadings phase, they contest the violation of the precautionary principle and of proper decision-making procedures (compliance with the EU Treaty and European regulations). If the annulment is upheld by the European Court, the judges could directly set aside the national regulations on the grounds of non-compliance with EU law. The effects would be felt throughout the European Union. All regulatory and administrative implementations of the downgrading would cease to apply.

**5) Cumulative mortality risks:** In addition to the already extremely high anthropogenic mortality (road accidents, poaching), authorised culls of 160 wolves per year could be introduced in Italy, potentially with the aim of opening a hunt for hybrids (based on unsubstantiated science), and possible further culls that could halt population growth.

**6) Non-scientific justifications for downgrading:** Predation damage (wolf kills accounting for less than 0.7% of European sheep and goat livestock) and risks to public safety (zero fatal attacks in recent decades) do not justify the downgrading measure, which responds primarily to political pressure from the agricultural sector – and is therefore based on grounds unrelated to the Habitats Directive.

**7) Funding.** We are witnessing a significant shift in European and national funding towards agricultural activities to the detriment of biodiversity.