

Albareto (PR), Italy

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To the attention of

Ms Jessika Roswall

European Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy

European Commission - Directorate-General for Environment

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Subject: Request for urgent review concerning the killing in Austria of the Italian GPS-collared wolf “Mirco” and possible breach of EU nature protection legislation

Dear Commissioner,

We are writing on behalf of *Io non ho paura del lupo APS* (Italy) and *ANCA – Austrian Nature Conservation Alliance* (Austria), together with a coalition of 23 European civil society organizations and independent experts, professionals and citizens, actively engaged in wildlife conservation, large carnivore coexistence, scientific outreach, environmental protection, and the promotion of evidence-based approaches to the management of protected species across Europe.

Our organizations have been working for many years on issues concerning wolf conservation, human-wildlife coexistence, scientific monitoring of large carnivores, and the implementation of European nature protection legislation.

We wish to formally bring to the attention of the European Commission a matter of serious concern regarding **the recent killing in Austria of an Italian wolf known as *Mirco***, an event that raises significant questions regarding the implementation of European environmental legislation, the application of derogations under EU law, and the integrity of cross-border scientific cooperation on protected species.

The animal in question was not an ordinary wild wolf randomly present within Austrian territory. **Mirco was a young dispersing Italian wolf equipped with a satellite GPS collar as part of an important long-term scientific research project coordinated by the Dolomiti Bellunesi National Park and the University of Sassari.** The project aimed to study juvenile wolf dispersal, a biologically fundamental phase for understanding population expansion dynamics, territory colonization processes, and genetic connectivity between Alpine wolf populations.

However, information that has emerged in recent days suggests that the circumstances surrounding this killing may be deeply problematic. According [to public statements released in an Italian newspaper by Professor Marco Apollonio](#), scientific coordinator of the project, **the wolf that was killed may not even have been the specific individual targeted by the culling authorization issued by Tyrolean authorities on 2 June 2026.** That authorization had reportedly been justified by sightings of a wolf observed near residential buildings in the municipality of Schlitters. Yet, as stated, at that date, GPS data from Mirco's collar reportedly **demonstrate that on the date of the authorization the animal was still located in Italy, specifically in the Province of Bolzano, and had not yet entered Austrian territory.**

Subsequently, once Mirco crossed into Austria, the Italian scientific team reportedly informed Austrian authorities in a timely manner regarding both the animal's presence and its movements. According to the same scientific sources, tracking data indicate that the wolf passed through the Schlitters area only briefly during nighttime hours on 7 June 2026, approximately at 2:00 AM, before moving into remote alpine terrain between 1,900 and 2,100 meters altitude, far from residential areas and apparently without displaying any problematic behaviour.

If these facts are confirmed, the implications are extremely concerning. It would suggest that an authorization granted on the basis of a specific risk allegedly posed by a particular wolf **may have been executed against an entirely different individual, one that had not exhibited any dangerous or problematic behaviour.**

An additional aspect makes this situation even more alarming. Mirco was equipped with a GPS collar and Austrian authorities had reportedly been informed in advance of his arrival as part of an international scientific monitoring project. **This raises the legitimate concern that information shared for scientific and institutional cooperation purposes may have been used, directly or indirectly, to locate and kill the monitored research animal.**

This concern is reinforced by the fact that Mirco's case does not appear to be isolated. **In February 2026, another Italian GPS-collared wolf, known as *Andrea*, monitored by the University of Udine as part of a scientific research project, was killed in the Austrian Land of Carinthia.**

Andrea had dispersed from Italy into Austria and had provided valuable scientific data on wolf movements across human-dominated and Alpine landscapes. His killing caused the abrupt termination of a major cross-border scientific monitoring effort.

According to reports, **Andrea was the only GPS-collared research wolf from that project and his killing was publicly justified under regional Austrian rules concerning so-called "risk wolves"**. The case raised strong concerns among researchers and conservation organizations regarding the proportionality of the measure, the treatment of scientifically monitored animals, and the broader implications for cross-border research cooperation.

Furthermore, as emerges from official documentation related to the case, movement data concerning *Andrea* — a one-year-old male wolf equipped with a GPS collar as part of a research project conducted by University of Udine under the supervision of Prof. Filacorda — were known to the competent Austrian authorities prior to the authorization of the removal.

As emerges from official documentation obtained by our organizations through access-to-information requests, Austrian authorities communicated to the hunting operators involved, on the very day the removal authorization was granted, the area in which the GPS-collared wolf was known to be located. However, no further updates regarding the animal's movements were subsequently provided after this initial communication. **This circumstance raises serious concerns about the reliability of the identification process adopted during the operation and whether adequate precautionary measures were implemented to avoid the killing of a scientifically monitored individual whose presence and location were already known to the competent authorities.**

Moreover, since the first Wolf Regulation entered into force in early 2022, risk wolves have been hazed away from residential areas more than 800 times in Carinthia. **Since then, authorities have authorized the removal of wolves on 261 occasions, resulting in 42 wolves being shot. Since 2022, Austrian authorities have authorized and carried out the killing of approximately 70 wolves. In the first half of 2026 alone, Austrian authorities authorized and carried out the killing of 24 wolves.** This indicates that the issue is not limited to one local administrative decision, but may reflect a wider and increasingly aggressive policy approach to wolf removals in Austria. Current distribution maps show that wolves dispersing from the south are simply unable to make it through the "death zone" of Austria and Switzerland. The German wolf population, which forms part of the Central European wolf population, is also affected by Austria's wolf culling policy. **It prevents the establishment of a stable ecological connection between populations, thereby hindering the genetic exchange. Genetic diversity (adaptive capacity) and connectivity with other populations are not present to the required extent. According to the 2025 Wolf Status Report by the Austrian Centre for Bear, Wolf and**

Lynx, the number of wolf packs in Austria has declined to eight, and the number of confirmed pups has fallen to seven. Only three packs were confirmed to have reproduced.

Particularly serious concerns arise from the analysis of the legal framework currently in force in the Austrian federal provinces of Carinthia, Tyrol, Vorarlberg, Salzburg, Styria, Upper Austria and Lower Austria. **The practice of categorically classifying alpine pastures as “not protectable”, as well as the low threshold for classifying wolves as “risk wolves” or “damage-causing wolves”, contradict the requirements of the Habitats Directive (Article 14), the Bern Convention, and the relevant case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, including Cases C-88/19 and C-601/22.**

Under the **Tiroler Jagdgesetz 2004 (Tyrolean Hunting Act 2004)** and, more specifically, under the **Achte Durchführungsverordnung zum Tiroler Jagdgesetz 2004**, updated on 25 June 2026, wolves can be classified as so-called *Risikowölfe* (“risk wolves”) **under extremely broad criteria.** [The actual implementation is not carried out by the competent authority itself, but by hunting right holders or licensed hunters. Once the authorization has been officially published, no further specific instructions or directives to the hunting community are required. No independent, case-by-case assessment under Article 14, no cumulative mortality assessment, and no mechanism for judicial review prior to the implementation of the removal (as required under the Aarhus Convention) are provided.]

Section 2(1) of this regulation provides that wolves may be considered dangerous to public safety if, among other situations, they are observed:

- within a radius of less than 200 meters from residential buildings, Game feeding or livestock facilities;
- on grazing areas or agricultural land;
- approaching humans in open terrain and remaining nearby for a certain period;
- approaching humans accompanied by dogs;
- appearing near inhabited settlements and being difficult to drive away.

These criteria appear exceptionally broad and may allow ordinary ecological wolf behaviour — particularly dispersal movements through human-dominated landscapes — to be interpreted as dangerous behaviour, even where no concrete threat exists.

Particularly concerning is the way in which so-called deterrence measures are defined and applied. In the documented Carinthian case, **the measures considered sufficient to trigger the subsequent classification of a wolf as a “risk wolf” consisted merely of loud shouting, whistling and honking.** Such actions amount to occasional disturbance, not to scientifically robust aversive conditioning. They do not allow any reliable conclusion to be drawn regarding habituation, boldness, loss of fear of humans, or actual danger to public safety. Treating the alleged “failure” of such rudimentary and non-standardised methods as a legal basis for lethal removal is therefore highly problematic. **It converts improvised noise-making into a decisive evidentiary threshold for killing a protected animal,** without any demonstrated behavioural assessment, without verifiable effectiveness, and without a scientifically validated protocol. **This approach appears arbitrary,**

disproportionate, and incompatible with the strict evidentiary and proportionality requirements that should govern any derogation leading to lethal removal. Even more concerning is **Section 2(3)** of the same regulation.

This provision explicitly states that where multiple incidents occur and **it is not possible to attribute those events to a specific individual animal**, authorities may nevertheless authorize wolf removals for a period of up to **eight weeks within** an area extending up to **ten kilometers** from the last reported event. In practical terms, this appears to authorize lethal removals even when authorities are **unable to identify with certainty the specific wolf allegedly responsible for the original problematic behaviour.**

Pursuant to **Article 14 of the Habitats Directive**, species listed in **Annex V** of the Directive may be subject to management measures governing their taking from the wild and their exploitation. However, such measures are permissible only if the species concerned is maintained at a **favourable conservation status.**

Accordingly, the possibility of authorizing the taking of wolves, now listed in Annex V of the Habitats Directive, is likewise conditional upon the existence of a favourable conservation status. In its most recent **Article 17 report (2019–2024)**, Austria assessed its wolf populations as **U1+ (unfavourable–inadequate).** **Consequently, the fundamental legal precondition for authorizing wolf removals (i.e. lethal killings) is not fulfilled. Austria's wolf monitoring does not meet the requirements of Articles 11 and 17 of the Habitats Directive because it is not based on a systematic, scientifically robust methodology capable of reliably assessing the conservation status of the species.**

According to the case law of the **Court of Justice of the European Union** (Cases **C-601/22**, **C-629/23**, and **C-674/17**), **authorizing the killing of wolves in the absence of a demonstrated favourable conservation status constitutes a clear breach of EU law.**

Where the conservation status of a species is unfavourable, Article 14 of the Habitats Directive requires Member States **to adopt appropriate management measures (such as hunting prohibitions) to ensure that the species is restored to a favourable conservation status.** Any derogation from such measures is permissible only under the strict conditions laid down in Article 16 of the Habitats Directive. **Article 16 constitutes an exceptional derogation and must therefore be interpreted and applied restrictively. It cannot be applied in the broad and systematic manner currently practiced in Austria.**

Therefore the approach is also contrary to serious concerns regarding compatibility with **Article 16 of Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive).**

Article 16 permits derogations from strict species protection only under very limited conditions, including:

- the absence of any other satisfactory solution;
- strict necessity and proportionality;
- prevention of serious damage;

- assurance that the derogation does not negatively affect the maintenance of the species at favorable conservation status.

Most importantly, the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union has consistently interpreted these derogations restrictively.

This issue is directly connected to the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union in **Case C-601/22**, concerning a previous wolf culling authorization issued precisely by Tyrolean authorities.

In that judgment, the Court confirmed that derogations under Article 16 of the Habitats Directive must be interpreted strictly and can only be applied where authorities demonstrate the absence of satisfactory alternatives and ensure that measures remain necessary, proportionate, and scientifically justified.

However, the current Tyrolean regulatory framework appears to permit a fundamentally different approach.

Authorities may identify a generic wolf presence near human settlements, authorize the removal of “a wolf”, and subsequently kill a completely different individual **without certainty that the killed animal is actually the same wolf allegedly responsible for the original concern**. If confirmed, **this practice would appear fundamentally incompatible with the principle of selectivity required under Article 16 of the Habitats Directive**.

Against this legal background, the killing of Mirco **raises serious doubts as to whether Austrian authorities are applying derogations in a manner consistent with EU law**, or whether regional practices are resulting in overly broad, poorly targeted, and politically driven lethal removals. Beyond conservation concerns, this incident also represents direct damage to scientific research.

Mirco and Andrea were part of complex, costly, long-term scientific monitoring programs involving months of preparation, capture operations performed under veterinary supervision, GPS collar deployment, public funding, technical expertise, and subsequent collection of valuable ecological data.

The killing of these animals did not simply remove an individual wolf. It effectively interrupted ongoing scientific research projects of substantial ecological and institutional value.

The cases of Mirco and Andrea, both Italian GPS-collared wolves involved in scientific monitoring projects and both killed in Austria within a short time frame, raise a particularly serious concern regarding the protection of transboundary wildlife research and the reliability of institutional cooperation between Member States.

The management of large carnivores is undeniably complex and may, in exceptional circumstances, require difficult decisions. However, **under European law such decisions must remain strictly grounded in rigorous technical assessment, proportionality, precise identification of the individual concerned, and full compliance with the legal framework governing protected species.**

When a wolf is killed simply because authorities have decided that *a wolf* must be killed, regardless of whether that individual is actually responsible for the alleged problem, **wildlife management ceases to be science-based conservation and instead becomes political action detached from technical and legal standards.**

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the European Commission urgently examine this case and clarify whether Austrian authorities have correctly applied European legislation governing derogations for strictly protected species, particularly under the provisions of the Habitats Directive.

Specifically, we request that the Commission assess:

- Whether the derogation authorization issued by Austrian authorities complied with EU legal requirements regarding strict necessity, proportionality, the absence of satisfactory alternatives, and individual identification of the target animal;
- Whether the Tyrolean legal framework established under the *Tiroler Jagdgesetz 2004* and the *Achte Durchführungsverordnung* is compatible with Article 16 of Directive 92/43/EEC, particularly regarding the authorization of removals where no specific individual animal can be identified;
- Whether a protected wolf involved in a recognized scientific monitoring project was unlawfully targeted despite prior institutional communication regarding its scientific status;
- Whether data shared between Italian scientific institutions and Austrian authorities for monitoring purposes may have been improperly used, directly or indirectly, to facilitate the killing of the tracked animal;
- Whether the killing of Mirco, considered together with the recent killing in Carinthia of the GPS-collared wolf Andrea, indicates a recurring problem in the treatment of scientifically monitored transboundary wolves in Austria;
- Whether the current Austrian practice of wolf removals is compatible with the requirements of the Habitats Directive, the Bern Convention, and the relevant case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union;
- Whether this case may constitute part of a broader pattern of misuse or overly broad interpretation of derogations allowing wolf culling in Austria;
- Whether grounds exist for further investigation and possible infringement procedures should violations of EU environmental legislation be identified.

The European Union has repeatedly emphasized that coexistence with large carnivores must be based on science, transparency, proportionality, and responsible governance.

If cases such as this are not subject to careful scrutiny, there is a risk of a further departure from scientific expertise and from the spirit of European environmental law. We therefore respectfully ask the European Commission to take this matter seriously and provide a formal response regarding the actions it intends to undertake.

We remain available to provide further documentation and any additional information that may assist your evaluation.

Sincerely,

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