



No:230/21  
Podgorica, 30.12.2021.

**Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro**

To: H.E. Dr. Oana Cristina Popa

***Letter of concern:: Alarming situation regarding poaching in Montenegro and need for institutional and legislative reform of the hunting system***

Dear Ms. Popa,

We would like to draw your attention to the threatening situation of hunting in Montenegro which has long been described as alarming, to the extent that the killing of non-game and even protected species has become our daily routine. Some of the examples are: decapitated bear being driven on a car hood through the streets of Podgorica, the bear killed in the Tara canyon, the bear killed in Mala Rijeka, the two killed griffon vultures with satellite transmitters from Croatia (Perun and Fojiška), pelicans, Eurasian eagle-owls, other predators that have suffered as a result of gunshot wounds, the recent cases of deer poaching on in the areas of Piva and Golija, killing of mother brown bear was in Berane, killing of roe deer in National park Durmitor, killing of red-deer in National Park Biogradska Gora.

Due to alarming situation, after the case of killing a female brown bear in Berane in February 2021, the initiative for establishing a five-year hunting moratorium, signed by 84 civil society organizations, was handed over to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and to the line minister Aleksandar Stijović personally. Also, after the above-mentioned case, Mr. Stijović publicly promised that in one month period he will present a plan for combating poaching in Montenegro.

Parallely with submitting the initiative for establishing a five-year hunting moratorium, CZIP and civil activities submitted a request to the Ministry of public affairs, media, and digital society for launching the electronic petition on the platform "Voice of citizens: e-petitions". Unfortunately, two months later, CZIP received a negative answer regarding the initiative. No reply was received regarding the request for launching an e-petition from the responsible Ministry of agriculture.

Six months later, in August 2021, CZIP finally received an answer from the Ministry of public affairs, digital society and media, responsible for the technical support and maintenance of the portal e-petitions, that this Ministry does not have the mechanism which will impact on Ministry of agriculture, forestry and water to submit the answer regarding a submitted request for e-petition launch.



After the case of the killing of red-deer in National park Biogradska gora, in order to raise the voices of citizens of Montenegro about the poaching issue, CZIP together with 12 environmental NGOs in November 2021 launched the online petition “The last-minute has knocked, give nature your voice” #MORatorium on the platform [www.change.org](http://www.change.org). 7033 signatures of Montenegrin citizens were collected for 30 days and the list of signatories and requests for establishing a 5-year hunting moratorium was handed over to the Ministry of agriculture, forestry, and water on 28th December 2021.

The prohibition of hunting, which we insist on, is the only way to allow enough time for implementation of an effective legislative and institutional reform of hunting, as well as to review the list of protected species and the duration of hunting seasons.

By signing the Bern Convention, Montenegro committed to protecting its wildlife, including the brown bear and all bird species - a commitment, which is also relevant for Montenegro's accession to the EU. As a party of the Bern Convention, Montenegro adopted the Rome Strategic Plan in December 2020, by which it committed to take a zero-tolerance approach to the illegal killing of birds and to reduce bird poaching in the country by 50% by 2030 (compared to a 2020 baseline). In compliance with the provisions of the Bern Convention and the EU's Nature Directives, we, therefore, urge the Montenegrin Government to take bolder action to stop poaching.

The hunting system should be urgently reformed due to the following reasons:

- The problem lies in the very organization in the field of hunting. The Hunting Association and hunting organizations are mainly NGOs (38 NGOs and 3 public companies) that are affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water. They have been entrusted with the management of the hunting grounds without the obligation to pay compensation to the state.
- Strategical document, Program of hunting development for the period 2014-2024 does not contain an action plan for the deadlines for the implementation of the defined activities, responsible bodies and indicators for the monitoring of its realization, budget neither the sources of financing in order to achieve the established goals.
- Hunting organizations monitor wildlife by themselves according to poor protocols or even without any protocols, as evidenced by the differences and inconsistencies in wildlife data that are displayed every year. Also, the Strategy does not propose



solutions for the unsolved systematic solution of the monitoring of the wildlife. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) appealed that it is evident and needed to differently organize monitoring of wildlife populations with the full implementation of the Rulebook of the methodology for determination and monitoring of a number of wildlife/game species. Also, EPA emphasized the following:

- The data related to the number of hunting game populations are illogical because the number for some wildlife species is the same for several years in a row.
  - statistics kept by hunting ground users are not at such a level that they can be considered as reliable for the assessment of hunting pressure on game
  - populations in hunting grounds and the question is whether the type of statistics kept by hunting ground users is adequate, bearing in mind the objectivity factor;
  - Comparing the data from the Environmental Protection Agency and Statistical office of Montenegro- MONSTAT on the number of wildlife species, as well as the number of shot animals in hunting grounds, it is concluded that they are not equal, although the collected data come from the same source.
- Also, the external mechanism of control of work of hunting organizations is completely absent, as it is performed exclusively internally, within the organizations themselves. In view of all the above, it can only be concluded that the system is ripe for complete reform.
  - There is no institutional hunting education nor one scientific project was implemented regarding the game species. Also, Montenegro does not have a central hunting information system.
  - Illicit means are intensively used in hunting. Specific data from the field are: 58 sound tape lures, 38 plastic baits, and 15 hunting baits have been registered by CZIP in the last 3 years. This problem is mostly present in the area of Zeta, National Park Skadar lake, Ulcinj, and Bjelopavlici. By conducting monitoring of the usage of the prohibited sound tape lures during the hunting of Common quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) in the last four years, it was observed that the same tape lures are usually returned to the places they have been previously removed by the CZIP team and game wardens from the local hunting organizations.



- Furthermore, the problem is reflected in the insufficient capacity to carry out regular activities of the hunting guard service, but also of the inspectors tasked with control. There are generally too few employed game wardens in each hunting ground, and there is often a lack of appropriate equipment for their smooth operation. On the other hand, the Forestry and Hunting Inspectorate employs 11 inspectors, based mainly in Podgorica. Most of them cover multiple areas and are out in the field rarely or never. Insufficient capacities for inspection supervision and the lack of will to solve the problem of poaching within the hunting organizations themselves is evidenced by the fact that the inspection service filed only 56 misdemeanor complaints in the period between 2013 and 2020. There are no controls in the early morning hours, when game activity is at its peak and when poaching mainly occurs; instead, inspection services are active exclusively during working hours from 7 am to 3 pm.
- Attempts to amend the Law on Hunting and Wildlife in 2019 were made in an extremely non-transparent manner, both in terms of drafting the document and in terms of public consultation, considering that Coalition 27 – a network of NGOs monitoring Chapter 27 – was not informed or involved in the process, even though this was the implementation of the measure from the National Strategy for Transposition, Implementation and Enforcement of the EU Acquis on Environment and Climate Change. These changes have been suspended because of our timely notice to the European Commission about their non-compliance with the EU acquis. The Law on Hunting and Wildlife was revised in the meantime by the law was not put into the procedure for adoption in Montenegrin Parliament. Despite the fact the Law is still not adopted, it is not included within plans and programmes of Chapter 11- Agriculture and rural development of the Programme of the accession to EU for 2021-2023. Hence, we kindly ask the European Commission to request additional corrections of the proposed draft from the Montenegrin Government and to emphasize the necessity of a transparent implementation of the procedure for amending the Law including a timely involvement of all stakeholders.
- Within the Chapter 27 of the above-mentioned document, it is mentioned that the Ministry of agriculture, forestry and water plans to conduct the changes of the Rulebook of the hunting seasons until IV quartal of 2023. Bearing in mind the alarming situation of the hunting system, the amendments to the Rulebook should be done as soon as possible and harmonized with the Decision on the protection of certain plant and animal species (Official Gazzete, no 76/2006).



We would like to invite you to add your contribution and raise these concerns directly with the Government of Montenegro, and in particular, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water. We would appreciate any other support you can provide within your institutional competence that would help the protection of wildlife and decrease poaching activities in Montenegro.

Kind regards,

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