

(2004/C 33 E/212)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-2076/03****by Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL) to the Commission***(24 June 2003)*

*Subject:* Funding for the protection of wolves in Russia in a natural environment by the establishment of extensive nature reserves such as cannot be established within the EU

1. Is the Commission aware that Russia is the only country in Europe where wolves still exist in large numbers and that they live in a natural habitat consisting of extensive, interconnected wooded areas where they act as nature's vacuum cleaners by killing of sick and weak animals?
2. Is the Commission also aware that experiments to return wolves to the wild will enjoy only limited success in the current and future Member States of the EU, since those countries have no interconnected and sparsely populated areas comparable with those in Russia, the result of which is that the continued presence of wolves in the Russian countryside remains of interest to other parts of Europe as well?
3. Has the Commission been informed that Russian nouveaux riches are increasingly regarding wolves as competitors in their hunting of boar, elk and bear for sport and that they are consequently paying large sums of money to professional hunters to kill as many wolves as possible?
4. Is the Commission aware of the experiments and investigations carried out by Volodya Bologov, a hunter turned conservationist in Boebonitso in the north-west of the Tver oblast (between St Petersburg and Moscow) with a view to promoting ecotourism and to managing wolves instead of killing them, and of the problems of acquiring funding for the maintenance of those activities because people prefer to give donations for the maintenance in and return to the wild of bears rather than for similar measures to help wolves?
5. What possibilities does the Commission see for EU co-financing of the sustainable survival of a nature reserve for wolves in the vicinity of EU territory, since something of that ilk is now no longer a serious possibility on EU territory itself? Who is entitled to apply for such aid?

**Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission***(18 August 2003)*

The Commission knows that the wolf population of Russia is still sound and viable; nevertheless, it would like to point out that Spain and Romania also have viable wolf populations. Though the wolf favours forested areas, it can adapt to human-influenced environments and thus enhance its survival chances.

The Commission realises the difficulties in establishing and maintaining the wolf populations at their former levels in the Western parts of the Union. The Carpathian mountain range in the Accession Countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania) still has viable wolf populations and the Commission endeavours to ensure their present and future well-being.

Wolf hunting practices in Russia leave much to be desired from a conservation point of view, especially as some of the federally funded regional conservation agencies provide special funding for this hunting. The Commission appreciates the work of the Central Forest Nature Reserve (Zapovednik) in Tver Oblast, with its research and ecotourism entrepreneurship programmes. In this context, the additional information provided by the Honourable Member is valuable.

The Community funding possibilities for Russian ecotourism/conservation projects are limited. The only Community funding possibility would be the TACIS programme. Under its rules, any project needs to fit into one of the agreed priority areas and needs to be approved by the Commission and the Russian Government in order to receive funding. Any Russian entity should address requests to the Director of the TACIS National Coordination Unit in the Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Ms Ganeyeva.