

**To:** Dietmar Woidke, Minister President of Brandenburg\*  
**From:** David Edwards, Policy Advisor  
**Subject:** Proposal to mediate the conflict of the wolf issue in the state of Brandenburg  
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52 Municipalities in Brandenburg have declared their wish to be a “wolfsfreie Zone” (Area without wolves), and the number of illegally shot wolves is on the rise. To prevent lawsuits against the state and avert a migration of voters to other parties in the next elections, especially considering the narrow lead of your party, I propose to set up a mediation to find potential joint solutions and satisfy all important stake holders. This mediation will especially enable the Social Democratic Party in Brandenburg (SPD) to gain a majority supported stance in this debate. Until now, your party has been avoiding this subject, and taken no clear stance.

**Background:**

The wolf has been extinct in Germany since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, the image of the evil, man-eating wolf is still embedded in German culture. Wolves are the main antagonist in numerous classical German fairy tales, for example “Little Red Riding Hood” or “The wolf and the seven young goats”. Against the backdrop of this, the repopulation of wolves in Germany, which used to be the centre of the wolf habitat, through wandering Russian and Polish wolves has polarized the population and the political parties in Brandenburg. The fear of wolf attacks on cattle has been an issue in local and regional elections, especially in Brandenburg, where a large number of wolves has settled, both packs and single individuals. According to the census 2017/2018 Brandenburg is home to 38 packs of wolves. Until now there have been no attacks on humans in Germany, while there have been numerous attacks on cattle and livestock, with 153 cases of killed or wounded livestock in Brandenburg in 2018. Especially in Brandenburg, with a relatively large portion of the population living in the countryside, this has a strong impact on the image of wolves and has even been a subject in the state election. At the moment wolves are protected and can not be hunted, except in some very specific cases, in which a bad behaviour is proven, for example when a wolf has lost its fear of humans and has repeatedly come close to human. Killed livestock will be compensated and the state pays for protection precautions against wolves

\*Mr. Woidke was Minister President of Brandenburg till the election on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 and is the leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in Brandenburg, which has the largest share of votes after the election. Therefore he will most likely be the new Minister President as well, even though no necessary coalitions have been made official at this point.

like electric fences and herding dogs. But farmers complain that the measures are not enough and that the compensations do not include the extra time and costs that they have to use to build and maintain fences as well as to train and keep the dogs. Hunters are afraid of a reduced amount of hunting game. The right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (AFD) has taken a strong anti-wolf stance, with even publishing flyers which depict wolves as a danger to children and demands to give hunters the permission to hunt wolves. Other parties have also taken strong stances towards wolves, either strongly opposed or strongly in favour, and this might endanger future elections for the SPD, if you can't find a stance which satisfies as many groups as possible. Nature conservation groups on the other hand are leading a pro-wolf campaign which will also affect voters and public opinion. So there are two opposing factions, which both can influence the public opinion against the SPD and have the resources to look for legal loopholes in any action taken and start costly lawsuits against the state government.

### **Stakeholders & Interests:**

1. Farmers associations, which have an interest in protecting their cattle from wolves. These associations include the Landesbauernverband Brandenburg (state farmers association) and the Bauernbund (farmer's association). They want more financial help in the precautions against wolves and see a limitation of the wolf population as a means for protecting their cattle.
2. Hunter associations, especially the Landesjagdverband Brandenburg (state hunters association), which want a general limitation of the wolf population and the permission to hunt them. They have an interest in as little loss in hunting game to wolves as possible. They have a financial interest due to the fact that they make money through the renting of their specific hunting grounds for hunts. They are afraid to lose income when such hunts lose their attractiveness due to a limited amount of hunting game.
3. Nature conservation groups, which have a central main organisation, the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU). They have the general goal of enabling a permanent and stable wolf population in Germany as well as areas of nature conservation.

4. The SPD fraction and government in Brandenburg. Your main goal is to satisfy as many groups in the state as possible and prevent a further polarisation of the different groups. Especially a rift between more urban groups, which tend to vote more for the left and green parties and support the repopulation of wolves, versus more rural areas, which tend to vote more conservative and are more critical about wolves, is to be avoided. The SPD as a middle-left wing party, which has the ability to gain votes from both sides faces problems in satisfying both groups. You do not want to lose the urban centres to the Green Party and the rural areas to the second strongest party after the last election, the AFD. For this you have to find a middle ground between the different groups.

Citizen's initiatives against wolves can be ignored in this mediation process right now, due to their relatively small number and impact. Obviously, the exclusion of citizen's initiatives can send the wrong signals, but those very few initiatives against wolves are very small and not organised in any way. Including them would give radical minorities a much larger role than is appropriate and complicate the mediation without any possible gain. The fear of wolf attacks on humans is still relatively low, and other factors play a much greater role in the debate. Therefore, I would strongly advise against it, unless they gain a significantly larger base and impact, which does not seem likely right now. At the moment, the majority of citizens actively participating in the situation are organised in or are influenced by one of the already mentioned groups and those are the groups that can actually influence public opinion. Even the 52 municipalities, who declared themselves to wolf-free zones, have done this on initiative of the Bauernbund, and not based on any anti-wolf citizen's initiative.

#### **Alternative to Mediation:**

Even though I would strongly recommend a mediation, there are alternatives. If you do not mediate between the groups and do nothing you must expect lawsuits in every new incident, law or administrative act concerning wolves. All groups have the organizational capacities to look for legal loopholes. Even though there is no concrete danger right now, all organisations have proved their willingness and ability to do so in the past. But far more serious than possible lawsuits are the impacts on the public image of the government. In case of more illegally shot wolves due to a strong anti-wolf stance in certain rural areas, stricter regulations concerning wolves or even a change in the status of the wolf combined with a hunting

permissions to hunt them, the NABU will actively advocate against the state government and this has a good a chance to persuade especially urban voters to leave for the Green Party. But if the number of incidents with killed or wounded cattle increases this will enable the farmer and hunter associations to sway the public opinion against your government and will enable other parties to position themselves as the voice of the farmers. Especially the AFD has been actively trying to do that. If you prefer one side too much, so either pro-, or anti wolf, you risk losing certain groups in the population and endangering the next election results. But if you choose to position yourself solely for one side without a mediation and inclusion of interests of all sides, I would recommend you side with the anti-wolf fraction. The farmers associations have a vital interest in the safety of their cattle and the wolf issue will be an important aspect for them and their members as well as many municipalities that live of farming. For supporters of the other side the wolf issue will be one of many aspects which influence their voting decision, and in most cases, it will not be a vital one. Nonetheless, this decision will cost you reputation and votes as well.

### **Why a Mediation?**

There are many reasons why a mediation is a good approach for this situation and can help to satisfy all important groups as well as to gain a victory for the SPD in the next elections.

Professional stakeholders: By excluding the small radical anti-wolf citizen's initiatives you are only left with professional organisations and stakeholders which should be able to find rational solutions and keep the emotional component at a minimum.

Additional information: This issue has many aspects and variables, to which each stakeholder can bring their own knowledge and views. This will allow you to find solutions which your government alone could not have reached.

All interest can be taken into account: The inclusion of all relevant groups will give you a chance to find a solution that will satisfy every stakeholder.

Reputation: By hosting and leading such a mediation between different groups you as a minister will show that you care about the issue and even if it does not achieve satisfying goals, you will gain credit for taking such a step towards an inclusion of all groups.

Future relationships: Wolves in Brandenburg will be a long-term issue. This can be the first step to a long-term cooperation between the stakeholders and might serve as a role model for

similar situations and issues in the future. Especially considering that several animals are expected to return to their old habitat, for example the beaver.

No current lawsuits: There are no lawsuits at the moment. This makes it easier to bring all stakeholders to the table and will decrease the chance of hostilities. Finding solutions now is a lot easier compared to a situation where a lawsuit has already been filed. All stakeholders are still relatively neutral towards each other.

Avoiding lawsuits: If it is possible to find a solution now you will avoid costly lawsuits against the state and can save both money and the reputation of the SPD in Brandenburg.

Wide range of solutions: While this includes the danger of losing focus, due to the many aspects of this issue instead of only one concrete problem, there are many opportunities to achieve compromises and solutions. Both sides have aspects with which they can negotiate. This is a situation with the possibility of added value for all stakeholders, instead of a simple win-lose situation.

High incentives to negotiate: All stakeholders are interested in finding a solution, because none are satisfied with the status quo. In addition, all stakeholders should be aware that the other stakeholders are not without influence and that it is easier to find a solution now than to have costly lawsuits or aim for a risky win-lose situation.

### **Potential Barriers to Mediation:**

Even though a mediation is the best solution, there is no guarantee for success. But as mentioned already, even if the mediation does not find viable solutions, there are still benefits. One of the main barriers to a mediation can be the political proximity of the Bauernbund Brandenburg to the Christian Democratic Party of Germany (CDU). They openly claim on their website to be Christian, conservative and patriotic, which puts them in opposition to the SPD, unless you will go into a government coalition with the CDU. This might not stop them from going into a mediation, but it can definitely create a very adversarial mindset. You must also consider that the Landesbauernverband Brandenburg is not only a farmer's association, but also has a hunter's section included. In negotiations they can have internal difficulties or will have an especially high number of interests to fulfil. In such a case, it could be a solution to prioritize the interests of the farmers in the organisation, because they are the majority in the organisation.

The hunter associations are the stakeholders which will likely be most averse towards the wolf, because unlike the already existing compensations for the farmers, no such thing exists for hunters. But they are also the stakeholders with the smallest number of members and the lowest influence. Nonetheless, a solution which includes them should be found.

Mediation costs should be carried by the state government, to enhance the chance of an initial participation of all stakeholders. Costs for solutions and actions based on the mediation should be shared, but with a willingness of the government to cover most of the costs, due to the limited financial resources of all other stakeholders, which finance themselves with membership fees and donations. Especially considering that it is likely that many of these solutions are proposals for state government action. Due to the relative open nature of the mediation, the risk of losing focus is high. To minimize that risk there should be an initial round, where all stakeholders should communicate their issues, before the actual negotiations begin.

### **Recommended Action Plan:**

1. Assign a mediator

This person should not have any political affiliations and should not be a member of one of the stakeholder groups. Especially any affiliation with a left-wing party must be avoided, to not endanger the participation of the Bauernbund.

2. Pick a location

It should not be affiliated with any of the groups. Rooms in a public city hall in Potsdam, the state capital, should be acceptable to all sides.

3. Invite the parties and communicate it publicly

This invitation should come either from your office or another high-ranking member of the government or party, to show your interest and the priority of the subject. It will also raise pressure on all groups to participate, due to media attention.

4. Publicly announce that either you or another high-ranking government member will participate

Past public events during the elections about the wolf issue have been visited by high ranking members of all parties except the SPD, who only sent regional politicians instead of state politicians. This was seen in the media as a sign of low interest,

especially to the Bauernbund, who hosted a public discussion this year. By publicly announcing the participation of a high-ranking member, you show all sides a very important amount of respect. Especially considering that rural areas in Germany are often worried that their issues and organisations aren't heard.

**5. Ask all parties to submit a paper of their main issues and preferred talk topics**

This will enable the mediator to organise the mediation and gain a first idea about possible solutions and problems. And, as mentioned before, it will help to keep the mediation and process focused.

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