

Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats



Standing Committee

Recommendation No. 98 (2002) on the project to build a motorway through the Kresna Gorge (Bulgaria)

(adopted by the Standing Committee on 5 December 2002)

The Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under the terms of Article 14 of the Convention,

Having regard to the aims of the Convention to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats;

Recalling that under Article 4 of the Convention each Contracting Party shall take appropriate and necessary legislative and administrative measures to ensure the conservation of the habitats of the wild flora and fauna species, especially those specified in Appendices I and II, and the conservation of endangered natural habitats;

Recalling that Article 4 of the Convention stipulates that the Contracting Parties in their planning and development policies shall have regard to the conservation requirements of the areas protected under the preceding paragraph, so as to avoid or minimise as far as possible any deterioration of such areas;

Recalling that Article 4 further provides that the Contracting Parties undertake to give special attention to the protection of areas that are of importance for the migratory species specified in Appendices II and III and which are appropriately situated in relation to migration routes, as wintering, staging, feeding, breeding or moulting areas;

Referring to the report of Mr Guy Berthoud on the project to build a motorway through the Kresna Gorge, drawn up following his on-the-spot appraisal [document T-PVS/Files (2002) 7];

Bearing in mind the work carried out under the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, notably the code of practice for the introduction of biological and landscape diversity considerations into the transport sector;

Considering that the Kresna Gorge site and its surroundings contain rare and endemic species and habitats of European importance that are conservation priorities and which Bulgaria has undertaken to protect;

Recognising the role of the gorge on an international scale as a prime axis of migration for migratory birds and insects and also at regional level as a point of exchange for the different types of vegetation and animal populations;

Having regard to the diversity of the ecological networks existing in the sector and the value of the archaeological heritage;

Considering that the area concerned is a major component in the implementation of the Emerald Network;

Aware of the foreseeable ecological impact of the motorway project on this natural sanctuary unique in the Balkans region;

Mindful of the need to reconcile the economic and ecological issues raised by this project and convinced of the necessity of identifying a route compatible with the natural and human environment,

Recommends that the Bulgarian Government:

1. take account, in the development of this project, of the imperatives of conserving fauna, flora and habitats as well as the concerns of the local communities in the municipalities concerned;
2. ensure that the decision on the routing of the motorway is taken on the basis of an in-depth environmental impact assessment (EIA) supplemented by scientific and mapping data and any other useful source of knowledge on the area concerned by the project, to justify the choice of alternative as recommended in the expert's report;
3. consider the possibility of abandoning the option of enlarging the current road since this would substantially increase damage to a unique site, without possible measures of compensation, and continue studying alternative routes located outside the gorge that would respect the natural constraints as far as possible and provide for the integration of engineering works and compensate for environmental impact;
4. ensure that the choice of alternative is based not only on technical, legal and economic criteria but also on social and ecological criteria;
5. institutionalise dialogue and seek consensus solutions with the different partners concerned; active partnership could be forged with non-governmental organisations with sound knowledge of the location of habitats and the presence of protected species, and the setting up of advisory groups could be envisaged;
6. provide for the downscaling and rehabilitation of the existing road, restoring its initial status of a local road used by the farming community and tourists and thus ease current pressure on the site, with suitable planning to revitalise damaged areas and provide user information services;
7. establish periodic site assessments (Kresna Gorge and motorway route), providing, as soon as the EIA is produced, the mapping and biological inventories necessary for long-term bio-monitoring;
8. select the zone concerned for the Emerald Network, by extending the central site to cover the gorge entrance and exit areas, to take stronger account of the biological functioning of the natural habitats and the connecting areas between the sites (ecological network of core area plus complementary areas);
9. ensure that adequate legal protection is given to the whole of the gorge site and its development areas.