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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

39<sup>th</sup> meeting  
Strasbourg, 3-6 December 2019

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**Complaints on stand-by**

**Presumed risk of national extinction of  
great bustards (*Otis tarda*)  
in Serbia**

**- REPORT BY THE COMPLAINANT -**

*Document prepared by  
EPAR-OIPA-Serbia / Alliance for Nature Protection, the rights of animals and people, Serbia*

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**UPDATED REPORT ON COMPLAINT SENT ON 19<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2016 / No. 2016/6****(PRESUMED RISK OF NATIONAL EXTINCTION OF GREAT BUSTARDS (*OTIS TARDA*) IN SERBIA) - No. 2016/6**

The reason for the 4. supplement of the complaint is the further disinterested behaviour and lack of activity of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Sector for the protected area and areas of the ecological network and the continuous illegal behaviour towards the Great Bustards within their only Serbian habitat, as well as the indifference of the Inspection of the Regional Secretariat for Urbanism and Environmental Protection and Regional Institute for the Protection of Nature, Novi Sad. In this manner, beside domestic law regulations, there is further breaching of Article 4 and Article 6 of the Bern Convention.

**New Facts**

Taking into account the continuing poor state of The Great Bustard Reserve and that the Great Bustard and other strictly protected animal species have not up to now received adequate protection and that no special measures of protection have been implemented, and there is no restriction nor control during the exploitation within the reserve from humans, we decided to again update the complaint and kindly ask the Council of Europe- Secretariat of the Bern Convention to in their frame of authorization positively influence the government of the Republic of Serbia which is responsible for such an unsustainable state which inevitably leads to the complete eradication of the Great Bustard. We especially wish to stress that the undoubtedly incompetent governor of the reserve, the Hunting Association "Perjanica" is still in this position and still governs the Great Bustard population and reserve, which is also exploited as a hunting ground. Our already previously expressed skepticism, unfortunately showed to be justified, since the situation described in the complaint from 19<sup>th</sup> of April, 2016 remained unchanged and continuing so in the years 2017, 2018 and now entering the year 2019, during all this time, regular hunting chases being organized.

1. On November 9th, 2018, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted a Decree concerning the protection of the Special Nature Reserve "Pastures of the Great Bustard" ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No 86), we hope you received the translation of this Decree, the Decree being available from link: <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/uredba/2018/86/1/reg>

The area of the reserve has been enlarged, almost identical as to that forecasted in 2009 (Announcement of procedures for enlarging the Special Nature Reserve "Pastures of the Great Bustard", ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No 44/2009)-about we have already written. The enlargement of the reserve is good, but without adequate measures of protection for the Great Bustard this is not satisfactory.

- Unfortunately, in article 8 of the Decree, it is ruled that the Hunting Association "Perjanica" governs this reserve, although we have previously elaborated that there are conflicts of interests, as this Association is primarily interested in using the area of the reserve as a hunting ground and it is incompetent and uninterested in protecting the Great Bustard and its habitat. In this way, the advice of the Secretariat of the Bern Convention in its letter of 16th of April, 2018 was not respected, on the potential substitution of the governor of the reserve. We advised the Ministry for Environmental Protection that the new governor of the reserve should be the " Association for the Protection of the Great Bustard " from Mokrin, as the members are young people, experts in relevant fields, who would be more capable in facing and solving problems concerning the protection of the Great Bustard, with no possibilities of conflict of interest, as they established this Association with the sole aim in protecting the Great Bustard and other protected wildlife in this area and they are not involved in

agricultural activities and hunting. Our suggestion was not accepted and the current incompetent governor remains as the legal authority for this reserve.

- In article 5 of the Decree, it is stated that within the reserve there exist only II and III degrees of protection. I degree of protection is absent, which means that the area of the reserve may further be exploited as in previous years, as regulated in the Law of Nature Protection, article 35. The regime of II degree of protection encompasses only 35% of the Jaroš area within the reserve, this being the most favoured area for the habitation of the Great Bustard, their swaggering and nesting. The previously designated Zone A within the reserve has been erased and does not exist anymore.
  - Forbidden activities are identical as in the old Decree from the year 1997, which showed all its weakness, being in synergy with incompetent governing, resulting in the suffering of the small Great Bustard population. – In protected areas of II and III degrees, hunting of Roe Deer is permitted from the 1st of April until the 31st of July, this colliding with important life activities of the Great Bustard, such as swaggering and nesting. These hunting activities were also previously detected as strong disturbing factors, and unfortunately, it is planned to continue with these activities in the future. Trophy hunting of the Roe Deer is entirely in the interest of the current reserve governor.
  - Beside numerous fires in previous years, which cleared the vegetation in the reserve, the author and bearer of the Decree, states that within the reserve with III degree of protection, it is possible to » light open fires for the purpose of governing the habitat"! This activity, lighting open fires is forbidden by three current laws so no Decree may allow this. Damages resulting from open fires in the field, we were able to document.
2. During the last year of 2018, we again reported the repeated threat to the nest of the Stone-curlew (*Burhinus oedicanus*). The situation from 2017 repeated, but only thanks to luck a pair of Stone-curlews succeeded in raising two chicks.
  3. During the entire 2018, suggested measures of protection were not respected and applied, including the advised measures submitted by the Secretariat of the Bern Convention concerning the Great Bustard Reserve, including:
    - Invasive mowing of the Reserve started again before the 15th of June (beginning of May 2018), without any activities by the governor, inspection or Regional Institute for Nature Conservation, and with no knowledge of where the Great Bustards are located or the localities of nests of other strictly protected bird species which nest on the ground or in the grass. During March - May were issued 4 Conditions of nature protection for mowing : No 03-318/4 – 13.3.2018, 03-988/2 - 28.3.2018, 03-559/2 – 7.5.2018, 03-629/2 – 28.3.2018. Later it was issued other conditions whose exact number is unknown to us. Much mowing was executed without conditions from the Regional Institute for Nature Conservation and were not registered.
    - There was no restriction and control of the movement of livestock herds which were dispersed throughout the Reserve, accompanied by dogs and shepherds, thus, it remained completely unknown how many nests of birds were destroyed on the ground and in grass by the two mentioned activities. A total of 9 conditions were issued for grazing as follows: Conditions of nature protection for grazing: No. 03-331/2 -28.3.2018, 03-629/2 – 28.3.2018., 03-380/2 – 28.3.2018, 03-627/2 – 29.3.2018, 03-631/2 – 29.3.2018., 03-515/2 – 28.3.2018., 03-560/2 – 28.3.2018. 03-875/2 – 19.4.2018., 03-874/2 – 19.4.2018. With each heard there were at least three dogs and a shepherd. A great number of herds of domestic livestock stayed in the area of the Reserve during 2018, areas of villages Jazovo and Sajan, but also Mokrin, although they had no conditions issued by the Regional Institute for Nature Conservation, nor did the reserve governor act, although these activities were seen. Under all conditions, he writes that the protective zone is 150 meters around the nest, while shepherding dogs are allowed to be 200 meters away from the shepherd.
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- Further, we point to the lack of moderation, uncontrolled use of pesticides which are without doubt used on every plot of land within the Reserve. According to the new Decree, the use of pesticides is allowed in the III zone of protection ie. on 65% of the Reserve area! On the harmful effects of pesticides is not necessary to elaborate here. There are a total of 13 conditions for processing the land in the reserve, while the actual number of plowed parcels is far greater.
4. During January 2019, the construction of a huge fence started in the heart of the Reserve Jaroške fields encompassing an area of 115 ha , of which we hope you have been informed, but it is unknown what the use is of this fence, with special emphasis on the fact that the Regional Institute for Nature Protection permitted such massive construction activities and noise between the 15th of January and 14th of July 2019, this period being the most sensitive time for the Great Bustard (especially from the 1st of April onwards), available on links: <http://www.ekourbapv.vojvodina.gov.rs/rs/%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BA-%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%85-%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8-%D1%83-%D1%81/?fbclid=IwAR2SSDhKuhzDAMgoMxEjAdcKZp9s3t6U7M5GqWkiBvkePFw9m36T82cNFJk>

Within the fence, some plots have already been ploughed such as plots No:15657/1, 15657/2, 15657/3 and 15657/4 encompassing an area of about 10-11ha and sowed with alfalfa and wheat. It is unknown who will use the harvest products, how and when the activities will start, all this indicating on the misuse within this fenced area. The remaining surface of 115 ha within the fence are pastures, under public ownership and it is forbidden to plough them.

For the whole thing to be more suspicious, the plots within the fence were offered on an auction for lease of public land ownership on the 26th of December 2018, in the Municipality of Kikinda. The auctioned cyphers for the space within the fence were 674 i 679. Anyone interested could lease them. What would then happen?

5. The new problem which will threaten the region within the Reserve is the restitution of agricultural land for which we still do not have information, but the Regional Institute for the Conservation of Nature in Novi Sad and other public administrations should act preventive and suggest to the Committee for Restitution the return of alternative land of similar quality outside the Reserve with the aim of protecting the Reserve, in public interest ie. To preserve the critically endangered bird species such as the Great Bustard.
6. We wish to add that after the death of the last adult Great Bustard male in 2016, of which we have also informed the Secretariat, there was no confirmed nesting or of young chicks, there is also no »young male« on which there was news and disinformation with the purpose of undermining our work and to falsely show the reserve governor in good light, although it is incompetent and does not contribute to protection of the Great Bustard.
7. During 2018, the Great Bustards due to the chaos within the reserve, stayed outside, as in previous areas on the location Vajlerka towards the Romanian boundary. As previous, during various periods, Great bustards returned to within the reserve, but were always forced to flee from it due to disturbance. In December 2018, our colleague who lives within the reserve succeeded in observing and photographing nine individuals, this being proof that the Great Bustards succeed to survive and that they are present and it is necessary to dedicate them considerable care and professional protection. Changes within the reserve must be systematic and aimed for the benefit of the Great Bustard, only cosmetic changes are useless although such activities are currently enforced. For all these described reasons, we submit an addition to our previous complaint and point to the fact that the state in the Reserve of the Great Bustard does not change, contrary, the Reserve is kept as before, possibly worse than previously.

8. It is unknown to us if Serbia signed the Action Plan for the Protection of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*).

From all mentioned, it is evident that there is absolutely no intention of implementing measures of protection for the Great Bustard and their habitat, except for sporadic cosmetic activities which have been dearly paid, with which we believe you have been informed. The enormous massive fence in the area of the Jaroške fields degraded the visual appearance of the landscape, it is not possible to conclude it's usefulness and in which way will this fence protect the Great Bustard, as the small population of this bird species remained there for years, on the completely clean, unprotected area towards the Romanian border. The thick wooden fence poles (instead of the light, thin, discreet type) which may be seen in the photos, look like landings for all feathered prey species.

Please excuse us for sending this addition to our complaint slightly late and we thank you for understanding.

With the great appreciation for all that the Secretariat of the Bern Convention has done and we hope will in the future concerning Nature protection and the protection of the Natural Heritage in Serbia, we greet you sincerely, hoping for better news during the forthcoming period.

Thank you in advance.

Kind Regards,

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*Save the nature!*

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