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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee
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Bureau of the Standing Committee
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2025 Strasbourg

**Recommendation No. 200 (2018) on the windfarms planned
near Balchik and Kaliakra, and other wind farm
developments on the Via Pontica route (Bulgaria)**

- REPORT BY THE COMPLAINANT -

*Document prepared by
Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds / BirdLife Bulgaria*

Update Report dated August 2025

Windfarms in Balchik and Kaliakra – Via Pontica (Bulgaria)

Follow-up of the NGO`s report

Document prepared by
the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds / BirdLife Bulgaria),
August 2025

For more than 16 years the Kaliakra wind farm case has been followed by the Bern Convention Standing Committee because of the risk and impacts on migratory birds due to wind farm development in Kaliakra IBA. During this period the Standing Committee adopted two recommendations in order to enforce the Bulgarian Government to comply with the requirements of the Bern Convention, especially on protection of habitats for threatened migratory and breeding birds, which were posed to risk due to wind farm development – Recommendation 130(2007) and 200(2018).

In 2022 the Bern Convention Standing Committee closed the case but decided to obtain reports on implementation of Recommendation 200(2018)

On 14 January 2016 the European Court of Justice issued a ruling in regard to the Kaliakra case (C-141/14), where it found that Bulgaria failed to comply with EU nature conservation law, in particular the Birds Directive, Habitats Directive and EIA Directive. Bulgaria is under a legal obligation to take the necessary measures to comply with the judgment of the Court (art. 260 TFEU). The decision of the Court confirmed at the highest level, what was also set in the Recommendation 130 (2007) of the Bern Convention, in particular to inadequate protection of the Kaliakra IBA, because of construction of the wind turbines. In 2023 the European Commission decided to close the complaint on Kaliakra, as they accepted that the measures taken by the Bulgarian Government are sufficient, in particular: implementation of Integrated Bird Protection System in 2018; designation of new territories for the affected birds and habitats in addition to the newly designated SPAs; specific measures for the maintenance of the priority steppe habitat 62C0; restoration plan for the affected priority steppe habitat 62C0*. The Commission services have been also ensured that the above framework is effectively implemented which should include: the updates, regularly provided by the authorities, including numerous planned and unplanned on-site inspections carried out constantly; the absence of building permits issued in the affected areas; the expiry of hundreds of authorisations; the continuing implementation of the restoration plan for the priority habitat by the Kavarna municipality; the implementation of the species action plan for the red-breasted goose. These measures are expected to continue being implemented and will also be followed through the EU co-financing mechanisms.*

We admire the efforts of the Bern Convention to encourage the Bulgarian Government in finding an adequate solution in regards to the Kaliakra Windfarms case, which include justified, scientifically grounded and time-oriented actions, included in the recommendation 200(2018).

In the following review we provide a short summary of the state of art and efforts made during the period 2023 - 2025 on case file Wind farms in Balchik and Kaliakra–ViaPontica in regard to Recommendation 200(2018), after the closure of the case file by the Standing Committee:

On recommendation point 2

We would like to notice that for the period 2023 - 2025 the Bulgarian government did not publish any clear follow up information on implementation of point 2 of the Recommendation 200(2018). In particular **it is not clear if at present the implemented monitoring scheme** strictly follows “scientifically appropriate methods”, that “addresses all types of potential impacts, including collisions, disturbance, displacement, barrier effects and habitat changes, and includes observations at both windfarm sites and comparable areas with no windfarm developments, so as to provide “control” comparisons”, as well as where the selected “control areas” are located. In addition, it is not clear if such a monitoring scheme is coordinated across all the Kaliakra installations. We cannot obtain this information, because the monitoring scheme is not agreed in advance with us and is not undertaken in conjunction with research by NGOs, including BSPB, supported by data-sharing agreements. The implemented methodology was not agreed with BSPB or other NGOs in advance. To date the government did not propose to BSPB such data-sharing agreement by, nor invited BSPB to any kind of discussions on implemented monitoring scheme.

The only known monitoring scheme which is implemented so far at the area of the problematic wind farms is the early warning system which is designed to minimize collisions of some species of birds, passing through the area. This monitoring scheme is also not discussed nor agreed with NGOs=

So far, the government did not make efforts to ensure that the information about the methods and systems used is available in a form which would allow these to be replicated at other windfarm sites elsewhere, as well as did not efforts to undertake related research where it would be appropriate and cost-effective to associate this with the field efforts already being made on monitoring and assessment.

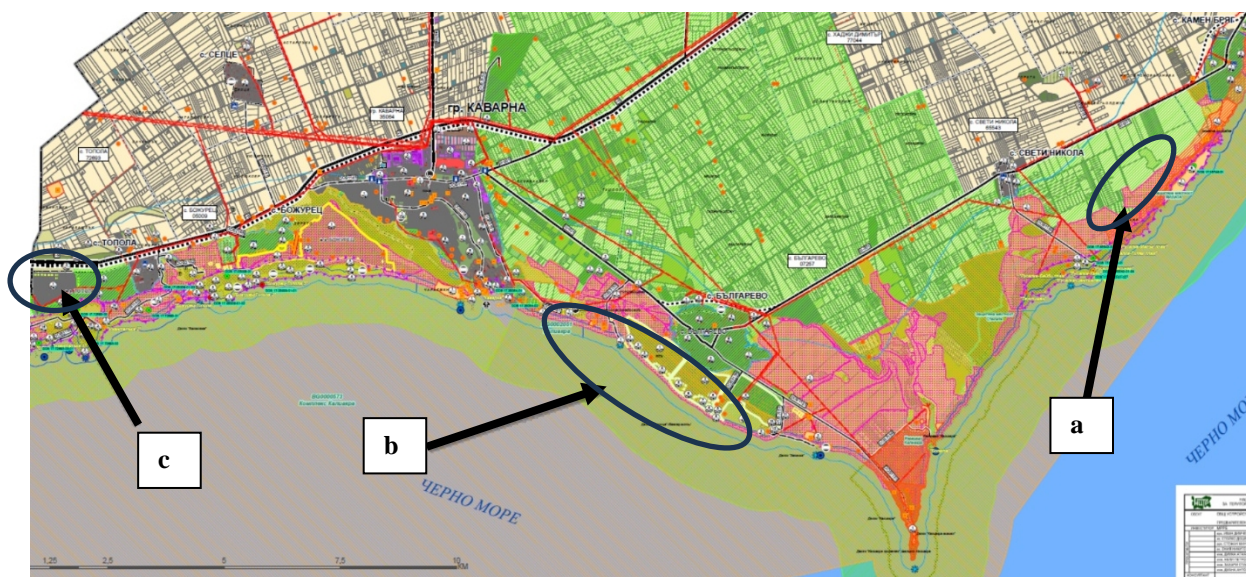
The results of implemented monitoring scheme were never discussed by the government with NGOs (including BSPB) and scientific institutions so we could not suggest if the results and insights are sufficiently justified in order to be taken into account for further planning. In fact, according to our information, these results are not included into national processes for planning and assessment of future developments. However, some selected results are probably used locally to advocate for more windfarm installations to be built in Dobrudzha region, neglecting the cumulative impacts (see point 5).

Following the above information, we could conclude that the point 2 of the recommendation is almost entirely not implemented.

On recommendation point 3

We do not have information about any new activities in this direction, in addition the small-scale restoration of steppe habitat, presented to the Convention back in 2019. There are still no results published by for the project on restoration of steppe habitats, about which we informed the Convention in 2019. Discussions among stakeholders to agree on appropriate measures, including NGOs were not organized. The Government did not take any efforts to apply mitigation measures related to habitat improvement or improvement of connectivity for safe movement of birds. In contrary, the draft Kavarna Municipality Spatial Plan which was published for public hearing in July 2025 included new areas of urbanization on steppe habitats (near Kamen Bryag village), in vicinity of steppe habitats in areas important for birds (south of Balgarevo village and west of Topola village) – all in the area of Coastal Dobrudzha (fig.1). In addition, all the land plots for planned wind farm installations, even those with expired documents and those in Bilo SPA (where the construction of wind turbines is forbidden) are included in the Spatial Plan as plots for energy production. This means that in all such plots windfarms can be built.

Figure 1 Areas for urbanization in key bird areas according the Kavarna Spatial Plan: a/ near Kamen Bryag village; b/ south of Balgarevo village and c/ west of Topola village



Following the above information, we could conclude that the point of the recommendation is almost entirely not implemented.

Recommendation 4

We do not have information about any action taken on the ground including impact monitoring of the taken measures. Having in mind that almost no measures were undertaken to fulfill point 3 of the Bern Convention Recommendation 200(2018), it is hardly to believe that any impact monitoring was carried out during the reported period (2023 – 2025) in order to assess the real impacts, risks for birds and the efficiency of the measures taken. So far, the Government did not provide any plans for removal of wind farms, but as long as it continues to state that all the options are exhausted, the removal remains the only option.

Recommendation 5

The moratorium on new wind farm developments in Dobrudzha and other sensitive areas along Via Pontica migration route expired in the end of 2020 and until now (2025) was never renewed by the government. At the beginning 2020 new enforcement of renewable energy production was encouraged by the European Union Policy and since 2022 (Russia invasion in Ukraine) the REPOWER EUROPE plan of the European Commission even more speeded up the process of transition to renewable energy in Europe. Amendments of the Renewable Energy Directive of EU¹ aimed to speed up the process of approval of new projects, but without harming nature, thus amendments include careful mapping of areas suitable for renewable energy production, where the results should be subject of Strategic Environmental Assessment. In addition, areas for the accelerated development of energy from renewable sources should be selected within the appropriate areas for renewables, and these areas should avoid Natura 2000, forests, grasslands and major migratory routes of birds.

We would like to draw the attention of the fact that there are still non-transposed texts of Directive (EU) 2023/2413 (Renewable energy Directive), as well as incompletely transposed texts that are not included in the Bulgarian Renewable Energy Law, in particular Art. 15b on mapping of suitable areas (not transposed), Art. 15c on areas for accelerated development (incomplete and inaccurately transposed), Art. 15d on civil society participating in planning and decision-making process (not transposed), and Art. 15e on energy infrastructure (incomplete and inaccurately transposed). The cited articles concern the most important aspect for the correct and successful implementation of Directive (EU) 2023/2413, ensuring no damage to nature - mainly the mapping of areas suitable for the production of electricity from renewable sources, areas for accelerated development, areas for network infrastructure and storage infrastructure necessary for the integration of energy from renewable sources into the electricity system, as well as citizen participation in the planning and decision-making processes.

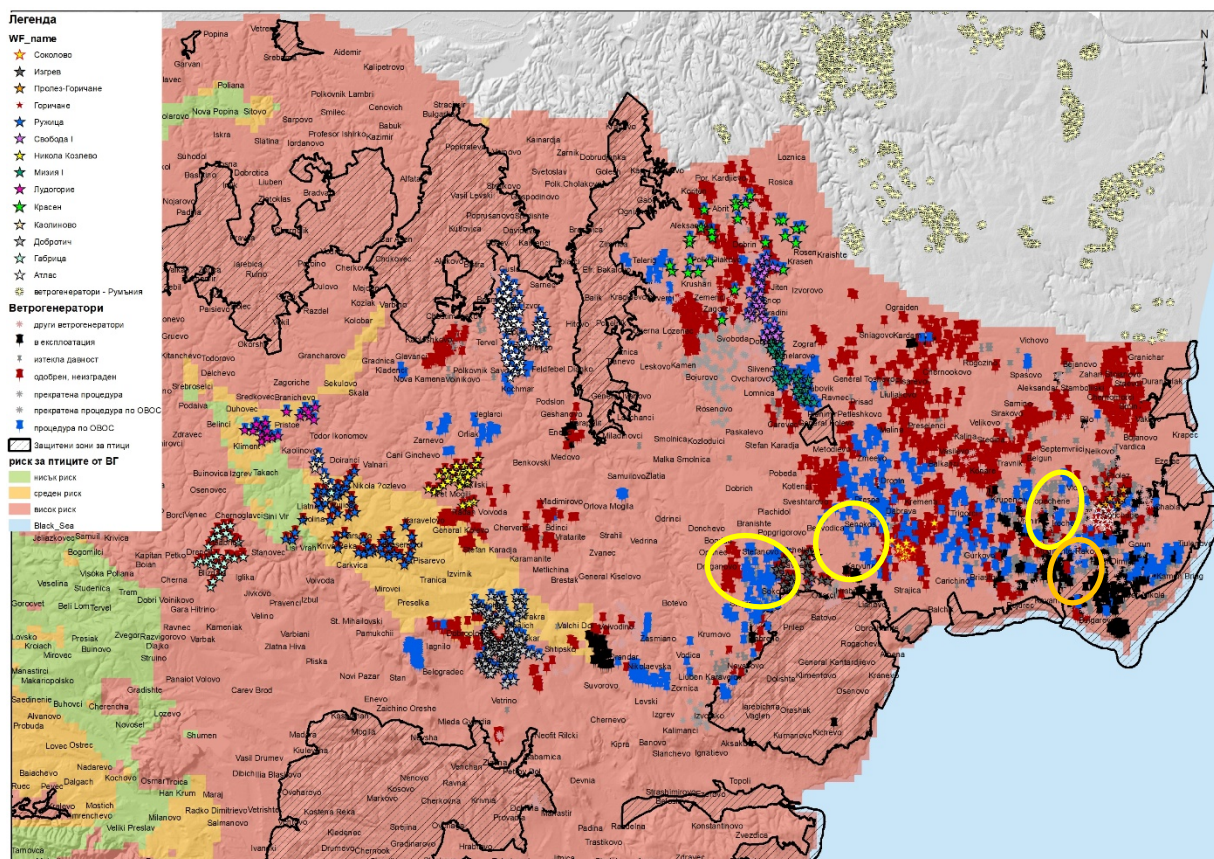
¹ Directive (EU) 2023/2413 of 18 October 2023

We draw your attention to the fact that at the moment there is no progress in mapping of the appropriate areas for the development of renewable energy installations in Bulgaria, and the mapping itself as well as the participation of the public are not regulated by the national law, as enshrined in Directive (EU) 2023/2413. At the same time, after Bern Convention closed the case file on Balchik and Kaliakra in 2022 and after the European Commission closed the Kaliakra case in 2023: renewable energy installations are being again intensively approved and built, which already cause damage to biodiversity - they lead to irreversible destruction of grass and shrub habitats, create a risk for migratory and nesting birds, damage aquatic ecosystems; procedures are underway for approving new large-scale projects, the importance and urgency of which investors argue with Directive (EU) 2023/2413, but without committing to comply with the requirements of Art. 15b, 15c and 15d, by arbitrarily choosing the locations of their projects, do not prioritize permanently disturbed terrains, do not exclude protected areas from NATURA 2000 and **bird migration routes** and do not take into account the opinion of civil society.

Via Pontica, one of the two largest bird migration routes in Europe, which passes through Bulgaria is particularly threatened by the continuous windfarm development, specifically: the geographical areas of Ludogorie and Dobrudzha (where its width is 150 km). Hundreds of thousands of soaring birds, waterfowl and songbirds coming from Europe between Germany and the Urals mountain fly along the Via Pontica migration route every year in autumn and spring, including **nearly 90% of the European population of the White Stork** (the species is concentrated in Europe worldwide), **100% of the European population of the White Pelican, over 66% of the European population of the Lesser-Spotted Eagle** (73% of the world population is concentrated in Europe). The responsibility for the protection of European populations of migratory bird species when they pass through Bulgaria is ours, which is why we have designated 18 Special Protected Areas under Natura 2000 network, whose object of protection includes migratory birds. However, the functional connections between them should also be protected in order to ensure the safe flight of birds. During the last 2 years, a significant number (more than 500) wind generators have been approved or are in the approval procedure in the geographical areas of Dobrudzha and Ludogorie (Figure 2). All of them include turbines with dimensions of up to 300 meter high with rotors of up to 200 meters diameter, which is at least twice bigger than majority of those, operational now in Bulgaria, the biggest on-shore turbines in Europe and with bigger impacts on birds. The risk is associated with both direct mortality of birds and the creation of significant barriers along their flight path (reducing their survival), as well as the loss of habitats important to birds as resting and foraging areas during migration. A large part of these projects are based on the contribution to achieving the pan-European targets for renewable energy and require the competent authorities to speed up the approval procedures, but at the same time they are not planned in irreversibly degraded areas (meeting the criteria under Article 15c, item 1, a- i of Directive (EU) 2023/2413) and fully fall within the scope of Article 15c, item 1, a- ii of Directive (EU) 2023/2413 – not just major migratory route, but one of the two largest in Europe. In the current situation, taking into account that Bulgaria is not among the countries with very good wind potential indicators, an unreasonably high risk is generated for a significant part of the European populations of migratory bird species due to the development of the wind energy sector, which is not in line with Directive (EU) 2023/2413.

In the area of Coastal Dobrudzha where the Government apply measures to comply with European Court Judgement – 17 wind turbines near Shabla Lake Complex IBA, SPA and Ramsar site are approved and other 33 are under procedure. In the region of Dobrudzha near Natura 2000 were approved two more projects with total of 33 turbines (near Batova IBA and SPA). In the western part of Dobrudzha and Ludogorie in total of 187 wind turbines are approved during the last two years and at least other 156 turbines are under EIA procedure initiated recently. Nevertheless, of strong opposition by local communities and despite that BSPB provided justifies statements during the EIA procedures and complained to the Ministry of Environment no one dangerous project was stopped by the competent authorities.

Figure 2 State of wind farm development in NE Bulgaria (Dobrudzha and Ludogorie) along the Via Pontica Migration route (legend: red zone – high risk for birds according to Bulgarian sensitivity map; yellow zone – medium risk; green zone – low risk; black pin – operational wind turbine; red pin – approved wind turbine but not constructed yet; blue pin – wind turbine under EIA procedure; grey pin – wind turbine with expired consent; light yellow stars – wind turbines in Romania; stars with different colors – new wind farm projects initiated / approved since 2023, after the Bern Convention and European Commission closed the Kaliakra case)



In addition, the **Integrated Plan for Energetics and Climate of Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030 (IPEC)** is still under a procedure of Strategic Environmental Assessment, thus it is still not adopted. The document points out the Northeast Bulgaria (Dobrudzha and Ludogorie) as area for intensive production of wind energy and in any way did not take into account the Bulgarian zoning map to minimize risks for birds, the Bern Convention Recommendation 200(2018) (including setting of moratorium) and the requirements of the EU Renewable Energy Directive.

At this stage the point 5 of the Recommendation is not implemented by the Government and even no indications that it would be happen. Even it seems that the Bulgarian Government do not respect at all the efforts of both Bern Convention and the European Commission to ensure safe and appropriately protected migratory route for European birds and once the both international bodies stop to follow the cases it started to behave as it did 16-20 years ago.

Recommendation 6

There is still no improvement on implementation of some important aspects, set in the Recommendation 130(2007), as the ex-ante evaluation and preventive protection procedure (EIA, AA and SEA) does not work properly in Bulgaria. Having in mind the situation described under point 5 above we would like to stress that the EIA reports of the new projects, mentioned above, are still of low quality and incomplete, especially in terms of adequate assessment of impacts on birds and bats, cumulative impacts on habitat loss, barrier effects, impacts on breeding birds, and risks for human health. Lack of ex-ante evaluation as part of the preventive protection procedure as well as lack of penalties for experts for providing such low-quality assessments are among the key reasons for the low-quality assessments. We propose that the Convention continue to ask this recommendation point to be implemented.

Recommendation 7

We confirm that not all of the required documents, produced by the Bern convention are available for the public in Bulgaria in Bulgarian language. As far as the official language in the country is Bulgarian all these documents should be translated in Bulgarian. In addition, we should notice that the placement of document on internet is not enough to state that it is sufficiently promoted. The Government should take active measures in this direction and should report on them.

Recommendation 8

We do not have information about any steps taken by the Government to implement this point

Recommendation 9

For the period 2023 – 2025 part of the actions under the Red-breasted Goose Action Plan were implemented by Shabla Municipality as part of project funded by the Environment Operational Programme. Most of the activities, subject of the project, are not related to minimizing the impacts of windfarms on Red-breasted Goose. Only one activity related to elaboration of ecological requirements of the species is important in this respect as it provides guidance for standards and measures to be included in further management plans and other documents, where protection of Red-breasted Goose is properly addressed. The Government and Kavarna Municipality did not take specific measures in this direction for the last two years. The Ministry of Environment is under procedure to establish capacity for management of Natura 2000 sites, after which elaboration of site management plans will be expected (one plan for all the Special Protection Areas in Coastal Dobrudzha). During the last year BSPB continue to implement measures upon this plan, that related to control on hunting and also lobby for continuation of application of agri-environmental measures during the next period of EU funding for agriculture.

Recommendation 10

We do not have information on the progress of implementation of this point.

In conclusion we could state that the implementation of Recommendation 200(2018) could be considered as it is started, but far from being fully and effectively implemented as well as some key points of Recommendation 130(2007) are still not implemented. At the same time the threat for migratory European bird populations is increasing significantly by new large scale and fast windfarm development without respect of the legal mechanisms which should ensure proper implementation of “no harm to nature” principle. At present not only part of the migratory populations, passing Coastal Dobrudzha and Kaliakra, are threatened, but entire migratory route passing through Northeast Bulgaria.

We recommend to the Bern Convention Standing Committee to RE-OPEN THE CASE FILE and follow closely the case until all the recommendations are fully and sustainably implemented; values for the site for migratory birds is restored and migratory corridor via Kaliakra area is safe for migratory birds.