Strasbourg, 19 August 2024 **T-PVS/Files(2024)67**

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

44th meeting
Strasbourg, 2-6 December 2024

Possible File: 2020/04

The Amulsar gold mine project and its impacts on Emerald Network sites (Armenia)

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

Document prepared by
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13 August 2024

Dear Mr. Poutiers,

Regarding the request from the Secretariat of the Bern Convention dated on 10th of April concerning complaint No. 2020/04 regarding the Amulsar gold mine project and its impacts on Emerald Network sites, filed by "EcoLur" Informational NGO, Armenian Forests NGO, Green Armenia Environmental Education NGO, and CEE Bankwatch Network, the Ministry of Environment (the "Ministry") would like to provide a brief update to the Secretariat on the actions taken by the Armenian Government.

In the annual report submitted by Lydian Armenia CJSC, detailing the outcomes of the environmental monitoring in the vicinity of the Amulsar mine, the Scientific Center of Zoology and Hydroecology of the RA National Academy of Sciences conducted research and uncovering a stable population of the Apollo butterfly. This population was situated at an altitude of approximately 2600 meters where earthmoving operations and related activities ceased five years ago.

The identified butterfly population inhabits horizontal piles of large stones and boulders, remnants of prior earthworks, now overgrown with vegetation essential to the Apollo butterfly's diet, resulting in active butterfly flight observed during the study.

The Ministry will continue to monitor the research closely and take appropriate action as required.

In response to the Bureau's remarks concerning the allegations of smear campaigns and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) targeting environmental activists, the Ministry would like to emphasize that the court cases involving Amulsar and environmental activists are strictly between private entities and do not involve the Government. The court cases are being heard within the legal framework of Armenia by an independent judiciary, and neither the Ministry nor any other external entity can or does interfere in these judicial processes. Upon impartial examination of all circumstances of the case and the positions of the parties, the courts render decisions in light of existing laws and regulations. Armenia remains committed to maintaining a fair and unbiased legal environment, ensuring that all parties have the opportunity to present their case and receive a just outcome based on the merits of their arguments and the rule of law.

Regarding the revision of the Emerald Network sites, the Ministry would like to inform you that the process has taken longer than expected. Under the framework of the "EU4Environment: Advancing the Establishment of the Emerald Network and Management of the Emerald Sites" project, the “Recommendations for review of the Candidate Emerald sites in Armenia” document was circulated among relevant state national authorities and several gaps have been identified. After incorporating the appropriate changes, the Ministry will circulate it among the relevant stakeholders.

Once again, the Ministry would like to inform the Bureau that despite the Armenian government's acquisition of a stake in the Amulsar project, it is currently not operational, and the construction has stopped since 2018. Armenia has fully adhered to its obligations under the Bern Convention at all times and despite significant pressure and threat of legal action by foreign mining companies, which has recently culminated in an investment arbitration currently pending before the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

In light of the efforts and circumstances outlined above, Armenia requests that the Bureau consider closing the complaint, with the provision for ongoing monitoring of future developments and reporting to the Bureau as necessary.

Aram Meymaryan
Deputy Minister of Environment of the Republic of Armenia