

Mr Karmenu Vella
European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

Dear Commissioner Vella,

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, are writing to you to express our concern with regards to the critical situation in two areas protected under EU law in Bulgaria: Pirin National Park and Kresna Gorge. We call on you to urgently look into case of Pirin National Park. Furthermore we ask you to intervene and ensure the whole motorway is out of the Kresna Gorge.

The Bulgarian government has recently pushed through changes to Pirin National Park's management plan that open up almost half of Pirin area to construction, which is a Natura 2000 area and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Meanwhile Kresna Gorge, also a Natura 2000 site, is under threat due to the construction of the Strouma motorway.

Pirin National Park is of immense value on national, European and global level due to its centuries-old forests and inherent intact landscape and biodiversity. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian Government wants to allow new constructions and developments in area without an appropriate assessment. This is in violation with Art. 6.3 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). We note with concern that the answers of the Commission to parliamentary questions conclude that no violations of EU-law have occurred in Pirin to date.

In Kresna Gorge, the Strouma Motorway is scheduled to be built. A recent court ruling by a Bulgarian court did not stop the construction plans. These plans pose an immediate risk for the unique flora and wildlife and violate the Natura 2000 directive. Thus it is high time for the European Commission to intervene to ensure that the whole motorway will be build outside of the Kresna Gorge.

Therefore, we urge you to reach out to the Bulgarian Government in order for them to observe EU law and protect the Natura 2000 areas of Pirin National Park and Kresna Gorge. In the latter case preference should be given to an alternative road outside the Natura 2000 site. An respective alternative plan was outlined already in 2008 in the appropriate assessment which was approved by the European Commission.

Furthermore, the European Commission should launch an infringement procedure against the Bulgarian Government for significant breaches of the law of the European Union, in particular environmental law including Natura 2000 obligations in the Pirin National Park and Kresna Gorge.

We ask you, Commissioner Vella, to identify the cases of Pirin National Park and Kresna Gorge in Bulgaria as a matter of urgency and launch an own EU inquiry in both cases.

We trust that the European Commission takes its role as the guardian of the treaties seriously, taking all the necessary steps to ensure Pirin National Park and Kresna Gorge are protected in line with EU nature laws and the expectations of the public.

Yours sincerely,

Ska Keller, MEP Greens/EFA Group

Sirpa Pietikäinen, MEP EPP Group

Catherine Bearder, MEP ALDE Group

Rebecca Harms, MEP Greens/EFA Group

Eleonora Evi, MEP EFDD Group

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Mark Demesmaeker, MEP ECR Group

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