



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Environment: Commission takes Bulgaria to Court for failing to protect endangered species**

The European Commission is taking Bulgaria to Court over its failure to protect unique habitats and important species. The case concerns the Kaliakra region, a migratory route and resting place for highly endangered species, where large numbers of wind turbines and other developments have been authorised without adequate assessments of their environmental effects. Although Bulgaria is committed to increasing the protection of rare species and habitats in the region, the reverse appears to be happening. On the recommendation of Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik, the Commission is therefore taking Bulgaria to the EU Court of Justice.

Under the EU [Birds](#) and [Habitats](#) Directives, any project that may have a significant negative effect on sites that are part of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas should undergo a prior assessment before it is approved. In parallel, the [Environmental Impact Assessment](#) Directive aims to ensure that any project likely to have a significant effect on the environment is adequately assessed before being approved.

Bulgaria has authorised a high number of economic activities in the area without appropriate environmental impact assessment. Thousands of wind turbines and some 500 other projects have been authorised without adequate assessments of their effect on Kaliakra's unique habitats and species, and on the thousands of birds and bats that fly over the site each year on their way to and from Africa. Up to 100 % of the global population of the world's most endangered goose species – the red breasted goose – spends the winter in a small number of sites in and around Kaliakra. No account is being taken of the cumulative effect of the authorised projects, which is also a requirement under the Birds, Habitats and Environmental Impact Assessment Directives.

A reasoned opinion on this matter was sent in June 2012. While Bulgaria has taken significant legislative and administrative steps over the last year to restrict the damage and prevent further developments that could affect the area, rare and unique priority habitats and species have been affected by a large number of wind turbines and other developments, either without environmental impact assessments, or with inadequate assessments. Bulgaria has therefore failed to comply with a key requirement of the EU Habitats Directive, which obliges Member States to take appropriate measures to avoid the deterioration of habitats and disturbance of species for which the Nature 2000 sites have been designated, and compensate for any damage that occurs.

## Background

The [Birds Directive](#) creates a comprehensive scheme of protection for all wild bird species naturally occurring in the Union. The 1992 [Habitats Directive](#) forms a cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy, protecting over 1000 animals and plant species and over 200 "habitat types" such as special types of forests, meadows, and wetlands, which are of European importance. The areas protected by the Directives make up [Natura 2000](#), the EU-wide network of protected natural areas.

Each EU Member State has designated Natura 2000 sites with the aim of assuring the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. The Natura 2000 network is comprised of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated by Member States under the Habitats Directive, and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the [Birds Directive](#). Natura 2000 is not a system of strict nature reserves where all human activities are excluded: most of the land is privately owned and the emphasis is on ensuring that management is ecologically and economically sustainable.

The aim of the [Environmental Impact Assessment](#) Directive is to ensure that projects which are likely to have a significant effect on the environment are adequately assessed before they are approved. Hence, before any decision is taken to authorise such a project, possible impacts on the environment are identified and assessed. Developers can then adjust projects to minimise negative impacts before they actually occur, or the competent authorities can incorporate mitigation measures into the project approval.

## Further information

For more information on infringement procedures:

[http://ec.europa.eu/eu\\_law/infringements/infringements\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/eu_law/infringements/infringements_en.htm)

On the October infringement package decisions, see [MEMO/13/907](#)

On the general infringement procedure, see [MEMO/12/12](#)

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