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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee
28th meeting

Strasbourg, 24-27 November 2008

Specific file

**Project to build a motorway
through the Kresna Gorge (Bulgaria)**

Report by the NGOs

*Document prepared by
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NGO update on progress on implementation of Recommendation No. 98 (2002) on the project to build a motorway through the Kresna Gorge (Bulgaria), November 2007

In 2002 the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention adopted Recommendation 98 (2002) regarding plans to build the Struma motorway through the Kresna Gorge. It indicated clearly the great importance of the gorge and the necessity to find an alternative route for the motorway outside the gorge that can satisfy the need for transport development while fulfilling the need to preserve the nature inheritance.

The failure of the road construction authorities in Bulgaria to implement the recommendation led to the Standing Committee opening a case file in 2004; construction of other sections of the motorway had already begun without overall Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and without a solution to the problem with the Kresna Gorge. This was accompanied by a delay in the announcement of a protected area in the region and other ecological problems.

Despite the initial huge difficulties regarding implementation of Recommendation 98 (2002), in the last three years there has been significant progress to avoid damage to the Kresna Gorge. Final detailed technical design of the tunnel alternative is designed to the west of the Gorge and approved by road authorities. The EIA report, elaborated in September 2007, which assessed two alternatives, including the tunnel variant, has been approved by the Ministry of Environment and Water. The final decision is that the Struma motorway has to pass the Kresna Gorge through a tunnel with two small sections going above ground. Financing for construction of this is secured and provided. The construction work is not started yet, so it is not possible at this stage to say how the proposed mitigation measures and the whole project will be implemented.

As a result of the opening of the case file there is now a high possibility for a successful fulfillment of Recommendation 98 (2002). We are optimistic that the prompt action of the Standing Committee will lead to the avoidance of damaging decisions in relation to the proposed motorway through the Kresna Gorge and the achievement of far better solutions not only in relation to the biodiversity of the Kresna Gorge but also in relation to encouraging open and democratic procedures for decision making.

However we recommend that the case file remain open until the section of Struma motorway to the Kresna gorge is constructed, in order to monitor the implementation of the project

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