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Brussels,

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Mr Andrey KOVATCHEV
Balkani Wildlife Society
8, Dragan Tzankov Boulevard
1421 Sofia
Bulgaria

Dear Mr Kovatchev

Thank you for your letter of 7 October 2001 regarding the project for the construction of a motorway between Sofia and Kulata, and, in particular, to the part of the project that concerns the Kresna Gorge.

I am glad to hear that the NGO community in Bulgaria considers that the activities of the European Commission, and of DG Environment in particular, have been useful in increasing the awareness of the Bulgarian authorities in relation to bio-diversity and nature protection issues. As you know, the Commission attaches great importance to the protection of the natural environment, as we believe that it is essential to preserve it for future generations. Personally, I feel privileged to be responsible for such a vital and challenging issue.

I would also like to thank the NGO community in Bulgaria for your active, enthusiastic and intense activities. I think that your role has been and is, essential in developing a better awareness in the Bulgarian society, be it in the institutions or with the people, of the problems related to the protection of the environment. But it is also important to increase the knowledge of the advantages that a better-preserved environment would bring to all of them – in fact, the whole of Europe will benefit from a cleaner environment in Bulgaria.

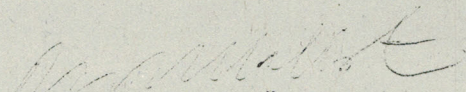
As I have already indicated in my previous letters to the Bulgarian NGOs on the Kresna Gorge issue, the Commission is aware of the problems that the originally planned alignment of the Sofia-Kulata motorway would cause to the very rich bio-diversity of the Kresna Gorge.

Thus, the information you are sending me is very important and interesting. I will forward it to my staff in DG Enlargement and also to DG Regional Policy, and to the EC Delegation in Bulgaria for their consideration and information. It would then be essential to liaise with the Bulgarian authorities responsible for the preparation of this project in order to get their comments and opinions on these new data.

I would also very much appreciate it if you could keep my services and me informed about the developments of these issues.

As we believe that the involvement and participation of the NGOs and of the civil society are an essential element of democracy, we look forward to hearing from you again, should you think that our input could be useful.

Yours sincerely



Margot WALLSTRÖM