

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1447/08

by Elly de Groen-Kouwenhoven (Verts/ALE), Margrete Auken (Verts/ALE) and David Hammerstein (Verts/ALE)
to the Commission

Subject: Illegal ski resort Kostenets - Belmeken Peak

The area of Kostenets – Belmeken Peak comprises imposing complexes of glacial lakes, siliceous rocky screes, acidophile grassland communities and priority nardus-grasslands on the Rila Mountain. On the lower altitudes there are century-old acidophilus spruce forests, forests of endemic Balkan pine and priority phytocenoses of dwarf pine. The forests provide key habitats for two priority mammals listed in Annex II of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC¹ – the brown bear and the grey wolf, and numerous bird species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive 79/409/EEC² – tetrao urogallus, picoides tgridactilus, dryocopus martius, aegolius funereus, and glaucidium passerinum. The area protects 178 species of higher plants, including two local endemics, three Bulgarian endemics, 11 Balkan endemics, eight rare species, nine protected species, two species included in Annex II of Directive 92/43/EEC, two species included in the European Red List (E/ECE/1249), three species included in the IUCN Red List, three species included in the Bern Convention lists, and four species under the Washington Convention (CITES).

Despite its great ecological significance the area lost its legislative protection due to speculative economic interests. It was the ski industry that persuaded the Bulgarian Government to remove the Rila Buffer from the NATURA 2000 sites list. Thereby, the local ski resort project 'Kostenets – Belmeken Peak' was freed from the strict ecological requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives. Many ski runs and lifts and room for 16 000 beds in the hotels are planned. In total contravention of both Bulgarian and international laws and directives, the local authorities of the Municipality of Kostenets gave the green light to build this massive new ski resort in spite of the fact that the main part of the resort is planned to be built in the Rila National Park.

1. Does the Commission realise that this planned ski resort will result in catastrophe for Europe's famous natural heritage located in the area of Kostenets – Belmeken Peak in Bulgaria?
2. How will the Commission ensure the fulfilment of Bulgaria's obligations under Directive 92/43/EEC, and when will the Commission undertake infringement proceedings against Bulgaria?

¹ OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

² OJ L 103, 25.4.1979, p. 1.