

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2190/09

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to the Commission

Subject: The National Park of East Macedonia-Thrace in the Republic of Greece: Vassova Lagoon

The National Park is under threat, owing to the non-compliance of the new Ministerial Decree (October 2008) with the existing pSCI, SPA and/or Ramsar boundaries.

The Vassova Lagoon: A large proportion of the marshes around the northern lagoon area are a designated 'industrial zone'. The area was until 1992 an extended wetland. The Greek legislation (ND 1650/1986) does not foresee any D zones in National Parks, and especially not for industrial development. The destruction of wetlands is against the Greek constitution.

A Ministerial Decree of 29 September 2008 ordered a 'partial' diversion (bypass) of the Nestos waters for the additional irrigation of 30 000 ha of agricultural land in the Xanthi and Rhodopi districts; part of the area will be outside the Nestos catchment area and is illegal according to EU Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC¹).

In view of the existing agricultural and administrative practice, this will lead to a total dry-out of the Nestos River during the irrigation period (April-September), which is also illegal; highly valuable and endangered wetland ecosystems downstream will be irreversibly damaged. The irrigation project is camouflaged as 'environmental restoration' for the recharging of groundwater tables with high salinisation close to the coast in the Xanthi district. Due to the heavy overuse of the groundwater, with hundreds of wells for irrigation of agricultural areas (many of them former semi-saline wetlands) strong sea-water intrusions into the ground water have taken place and reached up to 12 km from the coast.

How will the Commission prevent the deterioration of the European natural heritage located at the Vassova Lagoon in the National Park of East Macedonia-Thrace in the Republic of Greece?

¹ OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1.