

**Question for written answer E-004949/2011
to the Commission**

Rule 117

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Subject: Quarries in Natura 2000 area, Monchique, Portugal

Two mining companies have applied for a license to quarry for minerals within the municipality of Monchique, Portugal, in a area which is part of the National Ecological Reserve (REN) and the EU ecological network Natura 2000 (Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC). The total area concerned by the project is 2 612 km². One of the requests had earlier been published in the official journal of the Portuguese Republic (Diário da República, second series, No 58, 23.03.2011).

A group of citizens has had several contacts with the Portuguese authorities, but to date no answer has been obtained. The quarry is obviously a major threat to the site's biodiversity and to ecosystems of great value. It will also affect the landscape in an area of great potential for sustainable tourism, and will be damaging to the living conditions of the residents. It is also feared that the authorisation of a quarry will lead to many others, given the area's richness in minerals.

The Commission took out infringement proceedings on the grounds of failure to take measures for nature conservation in Portugal. These proceedings were closed in 2008, as the Portuguese authorities had created eight new special protection areas, including that in Monchique for Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraetus fasciatus*). This endangered species is protected under the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC), the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, and the CITES - Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Given the importance of this area and its EU protected status, and in the light of the legal basis, can the Commission state:

1. whether this projected quarrying licence is legal in a Natura 2000 area;
2. considering that the protection of wildlife and habitats is at stake within the terms of the EU directives, what actions it intends to adopt in order to prevent any kind of quarry licensing at this Natura 2000 site?