

**Question for written answer E-003217/2019
to the Commission**

Rule 138

Andrey Slabakov (ECR)

Subject: Support for delisting areas unlawfully included in the Natura 2000 network by dubious 'green' organisations in Bulgaria

When Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, the Government had to designate areas for inclusion in the Natura 2000 network. Perversely, the assessment of areas for possible inclusion was entrusted to two 'green' organisations with no relevant experience but with close ties to the government of the day.

As a result of this clearly nonsensical decision, 34% of Bulgaria's land surface was included in Natura 2000 – twice the average proportion in the EU Member States. The list of sites includes, ridiculously, places such as tailings ponds and part of the Belene nuclear reactor site. In the 12 years since 2007 there has been a series of overt rackets whereby corrupt 'green' organisations have used the Natura 2000 rules to impose organic farming by coercion. This was done on the pretext of protecting biodiversity but in reality it served the interests of those who controlled the organisations' finances.

The current Bulgarian Government has begun drafting new legislation on Natura 2000 areas. As part of a package of measures, areas which have no place in the Natura 2000 programme are to be delisted.

Does the Commission plan to consider and support the initiative for a review of Bulgaria's Natura 2000 areas?

Does the Commission regard it as normal that pseudo-environmental organisations should use the Natura 2000 programme as a basis for racketeering?

Does it intend to support the Member States by making available funding to combat such abuses?