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Answer given by Ms Roswall
on behalf of the European Commission
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Albania and North Macedonia, as EU candidate countries, and Kosovo*[1], as a potential candidate, are all expected to gradually align with the EU environmental acquis, including EU nature protection legislation such as the Birds[2] and Habitats[3] Directives. Both Albania and North Macedonia are also Contracting Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats[4] and must comply with its requirements, particularly the strict protection provisions benefiting the Balkan Lynx, since the species is listed in its Appendix II.

The Commission closely monitors the efforts of enlargement countries and regularly discusses the proper alignment with the EU nature protection acquis with national authorities. The Commission further provides guidance and recommendations to ensure a swift and efficient alignment, among others by means of the annual enlargement reports.

In the nature protection section of these reports, the Commission repeatedly stresses that it remains essential for the countries to advance quickly with the identification and pre-designation of sites that will be covered by the Natura 2000 network. The Commission will continue to monitor and push for sufficient implementation and enforcement capacities at central level in all candidate countries and potential candidates.

[1] *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.
[2] Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds, OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7.
[3] Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.
[4] Bern Convention: https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention