(English version)

Question for written answer E-001168/25
to the Commission
Sakis Arnaoutoglou (S&D)
(19 March 2025)

Subject: Marathonisi — Protection of the Caretta caretta sea turtle

Marathonisi, one of the most valuable habitats of the Caretta caretta sea turtle in the Mediterranean, is directly threatened by illegal construction work. Despite the area's strict legal protection status, the Zakynthos Building Service issued a building permit ignoring the presidential decree prohibiting construction in the area. The work, which includes deforestation, construction of a platform and the use of heavy machinery, has devastated the natural environment, stripped land and violated the park's protection conditions, causing serious disruption to the ecosystem and threatening the Caretta caretta nesting season.

In view of the above and given that Marathonisi is part of the Natura 2000 network and is protected by the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC):

1. Does the Commission consider that the issuance of the building permit and the construction work constitute a breach of EU environmental legislation?

2. Does the Commission intend to investigate the complaints and seek explanations from the Greek authorities?

3. How does the Commission intend to strengthen the monitoring and implementation of European environmental legislation in Greece in order to prevent similar illegal interference?

Submitted: 19.3.2025

Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(16 May 2025)

Marathonisi island is part of the Kolpos Lagana Zakynthou (Akr. Geraki — Keri) kai nisides Marathonisi kai Pelouzo Natura 2000 site (special area of conservation GR2210002). According to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive ([1]), plans or projects likely to have a significant effect on Natura 2000 sites, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, must be subject to an assessment of their implications for the sites. They can only be authorised if the integrity of the sites is safeguarded. When adverse effects on the integrity of a site cannot be excluded, the plan or project can exceptionally be authorised under Article 6(4) of the directive only under certain conditions.

The Commission is not aware of the building permit mentioned by the Honourable Member. Member States are primarily responsible for monitoring the application of the relevant legal provisions, including the Habitats Directive, and for taking the necessary enforcement steps. National courts are also fully competent to verify the compatibility of a permit with national and EU legislation. In its role as guardian of the Treaties, the Commission will monitor the situation and may decide to take appropriate action. The Commission aims to swiftly follow up on systemic issues involving the application of EU law in EU countries. However, one-off instances are better dealt with at national level, as long as there are available remedies, including judicial ones. In these cases, it is up to the national courts to apply and enforce citizens' rights under EU law.

([1]) 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. 7-50.