

(English version)

Question for written answer E-002351/26
to the Commission
Elisabeth Dieringer (Pfe)
(9 June 2026)

Subject: Austria Power Grid's plans for a 380 kV overhead power line between East Tyrol and south-east Carinthia

Austria Power Grid (APG) is planning a 380 kV overhead power line spanning approximately 180 km from Lienz (East Tyrol) to Völkermarkt (south-east Carinthia), which is to pass straight through highly sensitive Alpine forest areas. The plan involves pylons up to 90 m high, resting on concrete foundations with an area of 20 x 20 m.

In addition to the health impacts feared by local residents and the impairment to quality of life and housing, there are risks of significant land take, soil compaction, adverse effects on native flora and fauna and their biodiversity, as well as long-term and large-scale deforestation and permanent disfigurement of the natural scenery. The project is therefore in flagrant contradiction with the objectives of the Alpine Convention and with the requirements of EU law on the protection of forests and the restoration of nature.

1. What is the Commission's assessment of the project's compatibility with the Alpine Convention and the relevant provisions of EU law?
2. As guardian of the Treaties, what measures does the Commission intend to take to urge the APG to adopt a less harmful approach that protects the landscape and nature, namely the laying of underground or underwater cables?

Submitted: 9.6.2026

Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(12 August 2026)

The EU has not ratified the Alpine Convention protocols on Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation ⁽¹⁾, and on Mountain Forests ⁽²⁾, which could be relevant for the case, although they apply in Austria.

By contrast, the Convention's Energy Protocol ⁽³⁾ was ratified by the EU in 2006 and forms part of both Austrian and Union law. Its Articles 2, 10 and 12 contain relevant provisions on power lines.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive ⁽⁴⁾ requires an EIA for projects likely to have significant environmental effects, including overhead electricity lines above 220 kV and longer than 15 km ⁽⁵⁾.

The project, which is currently in the planning phase ⁽⁶⁾, appears to fall within that scope and therefore requiring an EIA, which must examine all likely environmental effects, including under the Birds Directive ⁽⁷⁾ and the Habitats Directive ⁽⁸⁾, ⁽⁹⁾.

On top of the public engagement which is compulsory for projects with a status of a Project of Common Interest, the EIA Directive also ensures public participation.

Member States are therefore primarily responsible for assessing these projects and ensuring their compliance with Union energy and environmental law and the Alpine Convention and its Energy, Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation, and Mountain Forests protocols, also when only in force in the specific Member State. In addition, the Convention has its own compliance mechanism ⁽¹⁰⁾.

⁽¹⁾ https://www.alpconv.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Convention/EN/Protocol_Conservation_of_Nature_EN.pdf.

⁽²⁾ https://www.alpconv.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Convention/EN/Protocol_Mountain_Forests_EN.pdf.

⁽³⁾ https://www.alpconv.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Convention/EN/Protocol_Energy_EN.pdf.

⁽⁴⁾ Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014.

⁽⁵⁾ As referred to in Article 4 comma 1, combined with point 20 of the Annex I to the same Directive.

⁽⁶⁾ The line has received a status of a Project of Common Interest (PCI) under the TEN-E Regulation. The Commission is closely following project's progress, and the inclusion on the Union list of PCIs is also linked with an obligation to provide detailed information on planned project implementation and public involvement (https://ec.europa.eu/energy/infrastructure/transparency_platform/map-viewer/main.html).

⁽⁷⁾ 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. 7-25.

⁽⁸⁾ 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.

⁽⁹⁾ Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, any plan or project likely to significantly affect a Natura 2000 site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, must undergo an appropriate assessment of its implications in view of the site's conservation objectives. Authorisation may be granted only if the site's integrity is not adversely affected, or exceptionally, if no alternative exists, there is overriding public interest, and compensatory measures are implemented. Member States must also ensure that the project complies with species protection provisions of the Birds (Article 5) and Habitats (Articles 12 and 13) Directives.

⁽¹⁰⁾ The Compliance Committee of the Alpine Convention has clarified that the Protocols' provisions remain binding despite the EIA exemptions and the renewable energy acceleration areas introduced by the Council Emergency Regulation on Renewable Energies (Council Regulation (EU) 2022/2577 of 22 December 2022) and the Renewable Energy Directive III (Directive (EU) 2023/2413 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 October 2023) and that Member States are not forced by these Regulations to violate the Convention and its Protocols.