

(English version)

**Priority question for written answer P-002562/24
to the Commission
Andrey Novakov (PPE)
(18 November 2024)**

Subject: Finalisation of the Struma motorway — the agreed way forward

Following media publications, I have learnt that the Struma motorway is going to be discussed at the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention taking place between 2 and 6 December 2024. The finalisation of the Struma motorway, with the completion of the last remaining section in the area of the Kresna gorge, is of strategic importance to improve the connectivity and security of the Balkan peninsula and the EU as a whole. It is part of the solidarity lanes necessitated by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and will be needed for post-war recovery efforts. It is crucial for improving cohesion and economic development, and for overcoming the deteriorating physical condition of the existing road.

Therefore, I would like to ask the Commission what position it will take at the upcoming Standing Committee meeting? It is my understanding that the Commission, in the spirit of loyal cooperation with the Member State of Bulgaria and for the benefit of all European citizens using this transport route, would confirm its commitment to the agreement reached with the Bulgarian authorities in February 2024 to 'make progress on the project in order to improve this vital transport connection' and recognise the steps taken so far, thus strictly observing the agreed way forward established by both parties.

Submitted: 18.11.2024

**Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(10 January 2025)**

The case 'Bulgaria: Motorway through the Kresna Gorge' (2001/04) was discussed at the 44th Standing Committee to the Bern Convention on 5 December 2024 ⁽¹⁾.

The Commission confirmed that in February 2024 an agreement on a Way Forward for the completion of Lot 3.2 was reached with the Bulgarian authorities.

This agreement considered the need to ensure compliance with EU environmental law for this project, which still lacks, while making progress on the project, given the vital importance of the motorway located on the European Transport Corridor Baltic — Black Sea — Aegean.

According to this agreement, the Bulgarian authorities need to carry out the following actions:

- The maintenance of the existing defragmentation facilities on the E79 road and the construction of three new culverts and appropriate fencing, in order to minimise mortality of protected species and maximise ecological connectivity in the gorge;
- The construction of the eastern lane, going from Kulata to Sofia outside of the gorge (as included in the G.10.50 alternative);
- If the authorities decided that the Sofia to Kulata lane of the Struma Motorway Lot 3.2 should be implemented on the existing E79 road, the implementation will be preceded by an impact assessment in view of the site-specific conservation objectives, which also include 'improvement' objectives, and fully addressing the concerns expressed since October 2019 by the Commission. The result of this assessment should be endorsed through an Environmental Impact Assessment/Appropriate Assessment procedure ⁽²⁾.

At the meeting, the authorities confirmed their commitment to proceed in line with this Way Forward and to continue to closely cooperate with stakeholders.

⁽¹⁾ <https://rm.coe.int/misc-e-44-standing-committee-final-draft/1680b2bbbb>

⁽²⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/law-and-governance/environmental-assessments/environmental-impact-assessment_en