



PLANTLIFE



February 2005

NGO statement

on proposed amendments to the Bulgarian Acts on Biodiversity and Protected Areas

We are greatly concerned about the draft legislation that has been introduced in the Bulgarian Parliament to amend the Bulgarian Acts on Biodiversity and Protected Areas.¹

The proposed changes provide opportunities for construction, privatisation and exclusion of territories from protected areas in the country as well as considerable limitation of the scope of the EU's Natura 2000 network. They also would permit restriction of public participation and consultation from the Natura 2000 site designation and amendment processes.

Bulgaria's rich store of natural heritage is internationally recognized. It includes UNESCO world heritage sites, areas protected under international agreements such as the Ramsar Convention on the protection of wetlands, and important endemic populations of flora.

As an EU accession country, Bulgaria has committed to transpose EU legislation and adopt EU biodiversity conservation priorities, including the Habitats and Birds Directives establishing the Natura 2000 network of specially protected sites. Passage of the proposed legislation would contravene the requirements of this legislation, putting at risk Bulgaria's accession to the European Union.

Bulgaria is also a signatory of the Bern Convention, which has similar implications as the EU Directives. As a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity and a signatory of the Kiev Declaration of Environmental Ministers, the country has also committed to join the global efforts to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. The proposed legislation would contradict these commitments.

The proposed legislation would also contradict the requirements of the Aarhus Convention regarding public participation in decisionmaking on environmental issues, which comes into effect in the European Union in the summer of this year.

The growing tourism sector in Bulgaria relies heavily on the rich and undisturbed nature of the country, with protected areas as pearls in the nation's crown. International and national experts agree that Bulgaria has great potential to attract tourism all year round by building on the country's undisturbed nature as well as rich historical and cultural heritage.

We therefore urge the Members of the Bulgarian Parliament to undertake all necessary measures to prevent the adoption of the bill on protected areas and to accept the NGO - proposed amendments in the Biodiversity Act. We express our full support for the Bulgarian authorities' identification of sites which are of European importance and efforts for their protection as well as for the sustainable development based on the wise use and conservation of Bulgaria's rich natural resources.

¹ Bill on the Amendment of the Protected Area Act, no. 402-01-69; Bill on the Amendment of the Biological Diversity Act, no. 402-01-74