European Commission urges Romania to protect the Sulina wetlands

Title The European Commission has urged Romania to improve its protection of the Sulina area in the Danube Delta, as new tourism developments threaten to degrade it. Romania now has two months in which to ensure its compliance with EU law in this respect, after which the Commission will decide whether to refer the case to the European Court of Justice. The Danube Delta area is viewed as one of Europe?s most important wetlands and forms part of the Natura 2000 network. Concerns arose when Romanian authorities approved a tourism development in the Danube Delta, which lies on the Black Sea coast of Romania. The Sulina beach development project includes cabins, boardwalks and restaurants in an area that is protected under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. Projects such as these are only permitted in protected areas in two cases; if there is certainty that they will not adversely impact a site?s integrity, or if overriding public interest in the development exists, there are no less damaging alternative solutions and compensatory measures are taken. The European Commission not only found the EIA carried out to be deficient in its consideration of potential impacts on local habitats and bird species, but also believes that the works will have a negative effect on a number of protected habitats and species. Data provided to the Commission by SOR (BirdLife Romania) shows that the project has already had a negative effect on one endemic species (Centaurea Pontica) protected under the Habitats Directive, and on a protected habitat (Mediterranean salt meadows). The Commission asked for clarifications from Romania in May 2010, but these have not dispelled the Commission?s concerns to date. Environment Commissioner Janez Poto?nik subsequently recommended that the European Commission launch infringement proceedings. The Commission?s firm action reaffirms that the Romanian Government needs to uphold its obligations to protect its internationally protected nature conservation areas (Natura 2000), many of which are under threat from development projects. The Romanian Government is already at the European Court of Justice over a failure to designate enough sites under the Wild Birds Directive, again as a result of action by SOR. Current statistics on EU Birds and Habitats Directives infringements can be viewed online here.