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****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

EU Court condemns Bulgarian Government for failing nature

According to the European Court of Justice, Bulgaria is failing to protect nature and putting threatened species at risk.

It's because the government hasn't properly safeguarded Natura 2000 sites on cape Kaliakra and adjacent coastal areas, allowing a large number of developments to go ahead.

The region is part of the wintering grounds of the Red-breasted Goose, a globally threatened species, and it is on the migration route of thousands of birds, such as White Storks and Great White Pelicans.

Projects such as wind turbines, a golf course, spa and hotels have been approved and built in the area by Bulgarian authorities, despite the likelihood it would lead to significant disturbance of these protected species. As a result, the court has today [Thursday 14th January] found Bulgaria to be breaching the EU's Birds and Habitats Directives.

The Bulgarian government has also breached the Directives by failing to fully designate the Kaliakra area as a protected Natura 2000 site. Although the government had designated the coastline, until recently it was not protecting the inland agricultural areas that are important for internationally important bird populations.

Wouter Langhout, EU Nature Policy Officer at BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, said: *"With this judgment, the European Court of Justice sends a strong message to Bulgaria. Natura 2000 sites shouldn't be bulldozed and turned into golf courses, and windfarms can't threaten major migration routes of birds. Member States need to stop allowing such sites to be destroyed and develop renewable energy in a way which protects nature."*

The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB), BirdLife's Partner in Bulgaria, has been fighting the continued degradation and destruction of this amazing wildlife site for more than a decade.

Stoycho Stoychev, BSPB Conservation Director, said: *"The judgement of the European Court of Justice reminds us that the Law should be respected and fully implemented. This judgement creates a loud and clear need for the Bulgarian government to take immediate action to remove impacts on the damaged Natura 2000 sites. It is also important that Natura 2000 sites all over the country are properly protected and the Government should ensure that it does not allow damaging projects in Natura 2000 areas, but instead encourages sustainable development that is profitable both for nature and people."*

As a European Commission 'Fitness Check' of the Birds and Habitats Directives continues, this case demonstrates the importance of these laws. The EU should be able to act where national governments are failing.

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Notes:

The Court of Justice's judgment is available to view here: <http://goo.gl/W10cJp>

More information on the EU Birds and Habitats Directives is available here:
<http://www.birdlife.org/europe-and-central-asia/birds-and-habitats-directives>

BirdLife Europe is a Partnership of nature conservation organisations in 47 countries, including all EU Member States, and a leader in bird conservation. Through its unique local to global approach BirdLife Europe delivers high impact and long term conservation for the benefit of nature and people.