WRITTEN QUESTION E-1551/01
by Alexandros Alavanos (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(28 May 2001)

Subject: Siting of a wind park in a protected area in the prefecture of Lakonia

The Ministry of the Environment, Regional Planning and Public Works and the Ministry of Development are planning to build a wind park, using Community funding, in the Zaraka massif in the prefecture of Lakonia, an area included in the Natura 2000 network (GR-2540001) and eligible for status as a special protected area under Directive 79/409/EEC (1) because of its large bird population. Concern is being expressed by ecological organisations concerning the disastrous impact of the project on protected indigenous and migratory bird species in the locality and the immediate threat to the landscape.

Given that, while the use of wind energy to generate electricity is clearly a preferable option, this should not be achieved at the expense of protected areas of major significance with a delicate ecological balance, can the Commission call for a survey of natural and cultural resources and land use in the municipality of Zarakas and, in the light of this survey establish whether the construction of wind parks is environmentally acceptable and whether the area is able to accommodate such a project?


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Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission

(6 July 2001)

The massif comprising Mounts Gidovouni, Chionovouni, Gaidourovouni, Korakia, Kalogerovouni and Koulochera, along with the Monemvasia area, forms a site proposed by the Greek authorities for inclusion in the Natura 2000 network under Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (1). The area has also been recorded by Birdlife International as an important area for birds, particularly migratory birds and birds of prey. In view of this, the national authorities must see to it that the site's conservation value is not compromised by activities undertaken there.

Formulation of management plans for Natura 2000 sites is primarily a matter for the Member States. In this particular case, the performance of a land-use survey as suggested by the Honourable Member for the municipality of Zarakas falls within the scope of Greek legislation and not within the jurisdiction of the Community, and so the Commission cannot intervene on that issue.

The ‘Competitiveness’ operational programme of the Community Support Framework for Greece for the 2000-2006 programming period provides for co-financing of investments in the construction of wind parks so as to curb the use of brown coal and restrict polluting emissions in accordance with Greece's international commitments in this area. To this end, Community support of € 191 million is set aside for the development of renewable energy sources.

As for possible co-financing of these projects, and in the framework of that partnership, the Commission will ensure that the national authorities comply with the relevant Community rules. Accordingly, the only projects eligible for co-financing through the European Regional Development Fund will be those which fulfil both their own environmental conditions and the environmental conditions arising from the assessment which must be carried out ahead of any activity liable to affect a Natura 2000 area in order to prevent that area's deterioration.