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The 16km-long Kresna Gorge is a hotspot of magnificent and irreplaceable Bulgarian and European biodiversity, home to 35 protected habitats and 92 protected species. According to expert estimates, twice as many butterfly species live in Kresna Gorge than in all of the UK.

The plan concerns the last remaining section to be built of the European E79 highway, which links Germany with Bulgaria and Greece, and has been funded with 800m EUR of EU taxpayers money.

The "Save Kresna" coalition alleges that construction of the motorway through Kresna Gorge would have devastating effects on rare wildlife, on local people who will be cut off from accessing their homes and businesses, and on the development of sustainable eco-tourism in the Gorge. NGOs have proposed multiple alternatives that are more sustainable environmentally and socially and would bypass Kresna Gorge.

On 12 July 2017 CEE Bankwatch Network, Friends of the Earth Europe, and the "Save Kresna" coalition filed a legal complaint to the EC, claiming that the plans already break EU nature laws, and they will file new documents to challenge the decision in the coming days. The European Commission will next be expected to pass judgement on the decision on funding for the EU motorway and to assess compatibility with EU nature laws.

Robbie Blake, nature campaigner for Friends of the Earth Europe, said:

"It is distressing to see the Bulgarian Government decide needlessly to destroy this European natural jewel with this motorway. The European Commission must not allow Kresna Gorge's stunning endangered wildlife to be massacred using EU taxpayer funds - it would be a crime under EU nature protection laws and much less damaging alternatives exist."

Anelia Stefanova, Programme Director CEE Bankwatch Network, reacted:

"The Bulgarian Government has taken an outrageous decision that breaches EU law, destroys European natural heritage, and violates the rights of local communities. The European Commission has no choice now but to seriously consider the case and block Bulgaria from using EU funds to break EU laws."

Source: bankwatch