

Strasbourg, 8 July 2010
[files13e_2010.doc]

T-PVS/Files (2010) 13

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

30th meeting
Strasbourg, 6-9 December 2010

Complaint in stand-by

**Threats to Vjetrenica cave
(Bosnia and Herzegovina)**

REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT

*Document prepared by:
the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

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**INFORMATION BY THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM
OF FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

Vjetrenica cave is protected under the category of Natural Monument in accordance with the Law on nature protection of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, article 28. („Official gazette of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina“ no. 33/03).

According to this law, area is declared a Natural monument with a following purpose:

„Protection or preservation of perpetuity specific outstanding natural features because of their natural significance, unique or representational quality, and/or spiritual connotations, to an extent consistent with the foregoing objective, providing the opportunities for research, education, interpretation and public appreciation, eliminating and thereafter preventing the exploitation or occupation inimical to the purpose of designation, and delivering to any resident population such benefits as are consistent with the other objectives of management.“

According to the same Law and its article 30.(„Official gazette of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina“ no. 33/03), „the proposal for declaration of landscapes or natural monuments as the protected area shall be carried out by the Cantonal ministry.“ All the activities regarding the control of the use and appropriation of the protected areas of nature, in this case of natural monument, is carried out by the Cantonal Department for Inspection.

In this connection, the jurisdiction for Vjetrenica cave is on the level of cantons in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On the other hand, when the proposal for the nomination for inscription on the world heritage list is concerned, we are familiar with those activities and the fact that Vjetrenica cave is enlisted in the temporary UNESCO list of world natural heritage. In case that, after all the necessary additional activities and procedures, Vjetrenica cave enters the UNESCO list of world natural heritage, it is going to be under the jurisdiction of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a natural heritage of national importance.

We have received the information that the Speleologic Society „Vjetrenica – Popovo polje“ has asked for help from the Bern Convention Secretariat, and we want to underline the fact that a single society is not in a position to contact the Secretariat directly, because every Convention that is ratified by a single country has an appointed focal point who/which is a connection between the country and the Secretariat of that Convention.

Ministry of environment and tourism of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, within their competence, has planned to include Vjetrenica cave in their Plan of activities for the year 2010, but all planned activities have been postponed for the next period due to the budget reductions for the year 2010.

When devastation and/or exploitation of natural resources is concerned, and especially if it is conducted on protected area, we have been informed that Municipality of Ravno has initiated the activities in order to draft municipality space planning, and it has been approved during the public hearing.

Also, Vjetrenica cave has been registered as a natural monument in the space planning of Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 1981-2000 (Decision of the Institute no: 979/52 by which Vjetrenica cave is placed under protection), and Zavala-Slano area is planned to be declared a special natural region (nature reserve), and that is the highest level of protection in accordance with the Law on nature protection of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, article 28., („Official gazette of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina“ no. 33/03). All this indicates that this is an exceptionally valuable area which we want to promote as such. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, our opinion is that jurisdictions of all the relevant institutions in the hierarchy of government of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina have to be respected.

In order to prevent any further devastation of this area, municipality of Ravno established Speleologic Society „Vjetrenica“ in 2003, and that way citizens were able to conduct the activities on the cave protection. In 2005, Public Enterprise „Vjetrenica“ was also established in order to perform the same activities professionally. At the same time, one of the main priorities of Ravno municipality was to build modern access road to Vjetrenica cave, and that road was finished during the summer of 2009, with the length of 6 (six) km.

After the demining of the area surrounding the cave, all the conditions for reconstruction of the cave were fulfilled, so the work on the reconstruction of its interior also started. These activities were preceded by a long-range of preparations and consultations. Space planning, as a foundation of Vjetrenica protection, was drafted in accordance with the Law on space planning of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, and only after all law-prescribed pre-activities were conducted. Space planning was drafted by „ECO-PLAN“ Mostar and „CPN“ Zagreb. According to it, a large area surrounding the cave is under special protection and it is defined as a „special natural region“. The entrance to cave itself is defined as the „world heritage“.

Vjetrenica illumination project was approved by the Ministry of physical planning of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The criteria for the approval were very high, as for the types of materials which are to be used, as well as for the type of illumination, and all that in order to protect and preserve the space and animal species for which this is the natural habitat. The government of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina approved the amount of 308.000 KM for co-financing. And together with the 106.000 KM from the government of Croatia, all the conditions for the realization of project were fulfilled and tendering procedure was started.

Works were completed in December 2009, and 520m of cave were illuminated (15% of its total length), new balustrades besides the paths were placed, and all this was done in order to make it functional as it was before the war devastations. Work contractor was „Ellabo-Ind“ and the supervision was conducted by the authorized bureau „Stari grad“ from Mostar.

During August 2009, for the use and needs of the PE „Vjetrenica“ and Speleologic Society „Vjetrenica“ a wooden bungalow was placed in the near vicinity of Vjetrenica plateau, but only after it had been approved by the Ministry of trade, tourism and environment of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton.

We want to confirm that there is no quarry, waterwell or industrial area anywhere near Vjetrenica and that cave is not devastated in any way. All the projects that have been implemented were previously approved in accordance with all the law requirements, and by the relevant institutions.