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Environmentalists Call on European Commission to Enforce Nature Protection Directives

As Polish officials continue to defy EC on Via Baltica route, activists urge legal action

"We ask Commissioner Dimas to follow through with his promise and request that the European Court of Justice stop the construction in the Rospuda Valley," said Agnieszka Gorczynska of Instytut Spraw Obywatelskich (Civil Affairs Institute) in Poland. Gorczynska is referring to the construction of a the Via Baltica expressway, which the Polish government is routing through the protected Rospuda Valley despite repeated warnings from the Commission and public protests.

Routing the expressway through the protected valley violates several European Commission directives, but the Polish government has repeatedly ignored warnings from the Commission. In a letter dated 28 February, the Commission gave Polish officials 7 days to respond and stop the construction. While the government did meet the Wednesday deadline, the response only insists that the planned route is the best option. Given the government's insistence on continuing construction through this area and dismissing alternative routes that would be less harmful to the environment, we are urging the Commission to take legal action.

Stavros Dimas, the EU's Commissioner for Environment, was quoted in the Polish media last week saying, "To prevent irreversible damage to nature we will ask the European Court of Justice to stop the construction." But Barbara Helferich of the Commission said today that it will take several days to analyse the reply. Helferich previously told reporters that the protected valley belongs not only to the Polish citizens, but to all Europeans. On behalf of Polish members of our network and the European public, World Carfree Network Europe asks the Commission to take all legal actions necessary to prevent irreversible damage to nature in the Rospuda Valley and enforce Community environmental directives.

"We would prefer that the Commission directed more funds to public transport than into building more car-based infrastructure," says World Carfree Network Europe Co-director Randall Ghent. "At the very least, the current environmental directives must be enforced. We urge the Commission to take all necessary legal action to ensure that the Rospuda Valley is protected."

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World Carfree Network brings together organisations and individuals dedicated to promoting alternatives to car dependence and automobile-based planning at the international level and working to reduce the human impact on the natural environment while improving the quality of life for all.