

[Commission refers Portugal to Court over its failure to adequately protect natural habitats and species](#)

The European Commission is referring **Portugal** to the Court of Justice of the EU for not designating Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) for the protection of natural habitats and species included in the Natura 2000 network and for failing to establish the necessary conservation measures for these sites.

Portugal had to designate seven SACs in the Atlantic region by 7 December 2010 and 54 SACs in the Mediterranean region by 19 July 2012. Portugal has also failed to establish the necessary conservation measures to maintain or restore the protected habitats and species in these sites. The current measures adopted in the framework of the Portuguese Natura 2000 sectorial plan (PSRN2000) and the other sectorial and special plans (e. g. the rural development plans (PRODER) and the municipal plans) are not comprehensive and precise enough to allow for an adequate level of protection and SACs designation. As recognised by Portugal, the designation of the SACs requires a prior mapping of natural habitats and species as well as the adoption of management plans for each site.

The Commission has repeatedly urged Portugal to fulfil its obligations. A letter of formal notice was sent in February 2015 and a reasoned opinion in [May 2016](#). So far, Portugal has not been able to respect its own commitments for SACs designation, and establishment of conservation measures.

Background

[The Habitats Directive](#) ([Council Directive 92/43/EEC](#)) requires the establishment of the Natura 2000 network, the EU-wide network of protected natural areas, made of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), and Special Protection Areas for birds (SPAs) under the [Birds Directive](#). Each Member State identifies and proposes sites that are important for the conservation of species and habitats occurring naturally in their territory. The Commission subsequently adopts them as Sites of Community Importance (SCI). Member States then have up to six years to designate them as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) but also to introduce the necessary management measures to maintain or restore the species and habitats present to a favourable condition. These are key requirements to protect biodiversity across the EU and consequently these cases rank high on the enforcement agenda of the Commission.

For More Information

-On the key decisions in the January 2018 infringements package, see full [MEMO/18/349](#).

-On the general infringements procedure, see [MEMO/12/12](#) ([an info graph](#)).

-On the [EU infringements procedure](#).

[More growth and jobs: EU invests €873 million in clean energy infrastructure](#)

Europe's transition to a clean and modern economy is the goal of the [Energy Union](#), a priority of the Juncker Commission. It is now becoming the new reality on the ground, and one important building block is adapting the European infrastructure to the future energy needs. Properly interconnected electricity lines and gas pipelines form the backbone of an integrated European energy market anchored on the principle of solidarity. Thus, supporting these [17 selected electricity and gas projects](#), signals Europe's willingness to upgrade and *make the European energy system more competitive that will ultimately deliver cheaper and secure energy to all European consumers.*

The EU funding for the chosen projects comes from the [Connecting Europe Facility](#) (CEF), the European support programme for trans-European infrastructure.

Commission Vice-President for Energy Union Maroš **Šefčovič** said: *"Once more we demonstrate that cooperation and solidarity pays off and that the Energy Union is becoming a reality with tangible impact on the ground. These are important projects with major cross-border benefits and by implementing them we strengthen energy resilience of EU Member States. The Connecting Europe Facility has yet again shown tremendous added value in the modernisation of the European economy."*

Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel **Arias Cañete** said: *"The construction of the Biscay Gulf France-Spain interconnection marks an important step towards ending the isolation of the Iberian Peninsula from the rest of the European energy market. Only a fully interconnected market will improve Europe's security of supply, reducing the dependence of single suppliers and giving consumers more choice. An energy infrastructure which is fit for purpose is also essential for renewable energy sources to thrive and for delivering on the Paris Agreement on climate change."*

Of the 17 projects selected for funding:

- 8 are in the **electricity** sector (EU support **€680 million**) and 9 in the **gas** sector (EU support **€193 million**).
- 4 relate to construction works (EU support €723 million) and 13 to studies (EU support €150 million).

In the electricity sector, a grant of €578 million, the largest Connecting Europe Facility-Energy grant ever awarded, will be decisive the construction

of the **Biscay Gulf France-Spain interconnection**. The new electricity link will better integrate the Iberian Peninsula into the internal electricity market. The project, with a 280 km long off-shore section, incorporates technologically innovative solutions regarding the design of the route over the Capbreton canyon and the French land section, which is fully underground. This new link will nearly double the interconnection capacity between both countries – increasing it from 2,800 MW to 5,000 MW, and will bring Spain closer to the 10% interconnection target from the current level of 6%. Such a leap will allow for an enhanced incorporation of renewable energies, thus contributing strongly to the clean energy transition and to the EU's clean energy transition policy.

SuedOstLink, one of the largest German energy infrastructure projects, will receive €70 million for activities to enable the construction works to start. The project consists of 580 kilometres of high-voltage cables laid fully underground. The power line will create an urgently needed link between the wind power generated in the north and the consumption centres in the south of Germany. It will thus ensure better integration of renewable energies, as well as enhance the cross-border exchange of energy with neighbouring EU Member States.

A grant of €27 million will also be allocated to support the construction of a new 400 kV **internal power line between Cernavoda and Stalpu** (RO), which will contribute to increase the interconnection capacity between Romania and Bulgaria and help integrate wind power from the Black Sea coast.

In the gas sector, the Connecting Europe Facility will support infrastructure projects important for two island Member States. First, the introduction of natural gas in Cyprus through the **CyprusGas2EU** project (EU support €101 million) will end the current energy isolation of the Cyprus, bring diversification to a region mostly dominated by one single source of supply and help reduce air pollution and emissions by allowing switching from heavy fuel oil to gas for power generation. It will also improve energy security and price competitiveness. Secondly, a €3.7 million grant will be awarded for a study on the **Malta-Italy Gas Interconnection** which aims to end Malta's isolation from the European Gas network. This interconnector will link Malta to the Italian market, enhancing the island's security of supply in gas in similar way a sub-sea cable funded by an earlier EU programme has done for the electricity sector.

Funding will also be allocated to a study on the permit-granting process of the **STEP project** (€1.7 million), which aims at creating a new gas interconnection point between France and Spain to increase the bidirectional flows between the Iberian Peninsula and France and improve the interconnection with the internal gas market through the development of the Eastern gas axis.

The Commission will also invest in studies to support the synchronisation of the Baltics with the central European electricity network. Today's decision is of key importance for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and Poland to agree on the way forward to find, by the end of May 2018 at the latest, a solution on the best way to synchronise the Baltic States' electricity grid with the

continental Europe system, in line with the results of the ministerial meeting from December 2017 (see [STATEMENT/17/5271](#)).

Background

Under the Connecting Europe Facility, a total of €5 billion has been allocated to trans-European energy infrastructure for the period 2014-2020. In order to be eligible for a grant, a proposal has to be [‘a project of common interest’](#). When completed, the projects will each result in significant benefits for at least two Member States, enhance security of supply, contribute to market integration, and enhance competition, as well as reduce CO₂ emissions. The list is updated every two years. The [latest PCI list](#) was published by the Commission in November 2017. The Connecting Europe Facility (Energy) already granted €647 million to 34 projects in 2014, €366 million to 35 projects in 2015 and €707 million to 27 projects in 2016.

For More Information

[List of all projects receiving EU support under the current call](#)

[Overview of projects financed by Connecting Europe Facility – Energy in 2014-2016](#)

[Current list of ‘projects of common interest’](#)

[Innovation & Networks Executive Agency](#) (INEA)

[News story: Defence Minister appreciates Scots UK defence role](#)

The Minister first met with the Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell, and the heads of the Royal Navy, Army and RAF in Scotland in Glasgow, having been appointed to his new Ministry of Defence role on 9 January 2018.

Defence Minister Guto Bebb said:

Scotland plays as vital role at the heart of UK Defence and national security. Right now, Scots-based sailors, soldiers and air personnel are delivering Continuous at Sea Deterrence, building the capabilities of the Iraqi Security Forces, working on behalf of the United Nations and countering Daesh across the Middle East.

Secretary of State for Scotland David Mundell said:

These are exciting and important times for the Armed Forces in Scotland. All three services in Scotland are growing their numbers, including building a single home for the UK submarine fleet on the Clyde, growth to 2 SCOTS and 3 SCOTS infantry battalions, increasing the RAF's Typhoon force, and the build-up to the arrival of nine new maritime patrol aircraft, at RAF Lossiemouth.

Scotland is home to more than 10,000 regular and 4,000 reserve armed forces personnel, supported by almost 4,000 MOD civilians.

Scottish industry benefits from Defence spending £1.5bn with it each year. This investment supports 9,750 private sector and highly skilled jobs in Scotland.

The MOD previously announced an unprecedented 20 years of work for the Clyde shipyards in 2017, safeguarding over 4,000 Scottish jobs, with the £3.7bn contract for the first three of eight submarine hunting Type 26 frigates to be built there. Through the UK National Shipbuilding Strategy, Scottish yards on the Clyde and at Rosyth are also able to compete for the five lighter Type 31e frigates which will come into service from 2023.

A further £1.7 billion is being invested to upgrade Scottish military bases over the next decade.

Scotland and its unique landscape provide crucial UK and Allied military training areas for infantry and armoured vehicles, air and sea defence, gunnery and missile firings.

The Minister will go on to visit BAE Systems Govan/Scotstoun shipyard to see how the yard's 800 highly skilled engineers and fitters are benefiting from a full order book until 2035, as they complete five new Offshore Patrol Vessels, and eight Type 26 anti-submarine frigates, for the Royal Navy – the first of which will be called HMS Glasgow.

Shocking rise in violent crimes & sex offences

Police recorded crime statistics show a rise in reported crime over the past year, in particular sex offences and knife and gun crime.

5.3 million crimes were recorded: a rise of 14%. The number of incidences of sex offences has increased by 23%, violent crimes have risen by 20%, with knife crime increasing by 21%.

[Go to Source](#)

Author:

Surge in rough sleeping shows more funding needed to prevent homelessness

Rough sleeping in England rose by 15% in the year to autumn 2017, according to new government figures.

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Author: