



PETITION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CONCERNING FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH COMMUNITY LAW

1. Full name of petitioners:

Plataforma Sabor Livre, Portuguese Environmental Platform of all major NGOs:
Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves, SPEA. BirdLife International partner in Portugal.
Liga para a Protecção da Natureza, Quercus, FAPAS, GEOTA. It has also the support of Environmental Defense

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4. Brief description of subject

The **Platform SABOR LIVRE**, a coalition of Portugal's six major environmental NGOs, including SPEA (BirdLife Portugal), opposes the construction of the Baixo Sabor dam, and is supported in this by BirdLife International.

The building of a dam on the Sabor River in Northern Portugal would have irreversible environmental impacts and ultimately destroy a unique ecosystem containing old Mediterranean forests and rugged cliffs. Endangered birds such as Bonelli's eagle, Golden eagle and Black stork would be affected. It is because of this unique biodiversity that the region is protected under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. Alternative investments in energy generation and efficiency in Portugal can ensure a more affordable and ecologically sustainable energy supply than the construction of a dam in this unique area.

4.1 Why do we oppose the dam?

1) The area which would be severely affected by the Baixo Sabor dam has unique ecological value and is irreplaceable. The importance of the area is attested by its designation as a Natura 2000 site (Portuguese SPA: PTZPE0037, Portuguese SCI: PTCON0021)

Birds Directive: The Sabor valley is a critical habitat for endangered bird species such as Bonelli's eagle, Golden eagle, Egyptian vulture and Black stork which nest on the steep cliff formations alongside the valley. This fact motivated the classification of the valley as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the EU Birds Directive and as an Important Bird Area (IBA), following the criteria of Birdlife International.

Habitats Directive: The Sabor valley is rich in endemic plant species and has a high diversity of habitats, of which 20 are included in the EU Habitats Directive, four even as priority habitats. The Sabor valley contains the largest extension of well-preserved Cork and Holm oak woodlands of the Tras-os-Montes province.

The valley also is an important refuge and ecological corridor for a faunal community that includes wolf, water vole, river otter, wildcat and roe deer. The Sabor river is the spawning ground for several autochthonous fish species. [It might be worth stressing which of these species are priority species (Annex II Habitats Directive) and which need strict protection (Annex IV Habitats Directive)]

2) The impacts of the Sabor dam on this unique Natura 2000 site would be devastating and irreversible (e.g. destruction of habitats, extinction and substantial reduction of migratory and resident bird and fish populations, contamination of water reserves, retention of sediments and nutrients, etc.).

The construction of the Baixo Sabor dam would also entail the irreversible destruction of important agricultural lands (such as in the Felgar valley, one of the most fertile zones of the whole Tras-os-Montes province, where almost 60.000 litres of high quality olive oil are produced annually) and it would threaten important natural and cultural sites of the region.

3) Alternative solutions exist: E.g. the construction of a dam at the Alto Côa river valley – which is one reason why Art. 6 of the Habitats Directive would be infringed if the project was realised in the Sabor valley.

The European Commission has rightly opened an Infringement Procedure against Portugal, as the mentioned project does not comply with the provisions of the EU Habitats Directives, including the requirements of Articles 6(3)(4) which set out the procedures which must be followed and the conditions which must be fulfilled for consent to be granted for a project which will effect a Natura 2000 site.

4) *Alternative solutions exist: E.g. the zero option - obviating the need for a dam by increasing energy efficiency*

In order to strategically address its legitimate needs for energy generation, climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation Portugal should develop a national energy plan. Through such a plan it would become clear that projects like the **Sabor dam would destroy unique natural values without need**: The energy produced by this dam would contribute, in the best of cases with only 0.6% to the energy consumed in Portugal, an amount that could easily be covered through increased energy efficiency. Portugal is still one of the countries with lowest energy efficiency in all of the European Union!

5. Request to the Petition Committee

Platform SABOR LIVRE and BirdLife International call upon the European Commission to:

- Take action on the Sabor Dam case as a matter of urgency.
- Ensure that the Portuguese Government suspends work on the project until the requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives have been properly fulfilled.
- Ensure that no EU structural funds are allocated to the project until the Commission is satisfied that the Birds and Habitats Directive have been properly fulfilled.

These actions are essential to save the unique natural heritage of the Sabor valley Natura 2000 site.

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For more information about the Sabor Campaign visit www.saborlivre.org