

**Question for written answer E-014479/2015
to the Commission**
Rule 130
Monika Vana (Verts/ALE)

Subject: Presence of ground squirrels on Vienna Heeresspital site

The European ground squirrel (*Spermophilus citellus*) is a species of small mammal strictly protected under Annexes II and IV of the Habitats Directive. The Vienna Heeresspital (military hospital) site is home to one of the largest ground squirrel populations in Austria – approximately 800 individuals.

However, a substantial section of the habitat has been bought up by property developers and classified by the Vienna municipal authority as valuable building land.

Citizens' action groups believe that many aspects of the authority's decision on the requisite nature-protection measures are questionable under EU law: for example, the deliberate disturbance of the ground squirrels in order to relocate them. Moreover, Vienna's current ground squirrel action plan makes no provision for supporting the Heeresspital population.

Because there are few ways to contest the municipal authority's decision at national level, one citizens' action group lodged a complaint about it with the Commission. In an initial letter, the Commission critically questioned the steps taken by the authority and required Austria to provide further information.

1. How successful has the officially approved scheme for relocating the ground squirrels been, and is the Commission aware of any reports to the Vienna municipal authority documenting the scheme's success or otherwise?
2. Does the Commission know why Vienna's ground squirrel action plan omits provision for any active measures to support the Heeresspital population?
3. Have the Commission's preliminary proceedings against Austria in relation to the Heeresspital ground squirrels been suspended? If not, why not?