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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

38th meeting
Strasbourg, 27-30 November 2018

Complaints in stand-by

**Possible threat to “Svaneti 1” Candidate
Emerald Site (GE0000012) from Nenskra
Hydro Power Plant development
(Georgia)**

- REPORT BY THE COMPLAINANT -

*Document prepared by
the Green Alternative (Georgia) and the Balkani Wildlife Society (Bulgaria)*

- September 2018 -



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Ms. Iva Obretenova - Secretary of the Bern Convention
Mr. Marc Hory - Project Manager - European Diploma for Protected Areas and Emerald Network
Ms. Véronique De Cussac - Administrative Assistant
Bureau of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention

Subject: Complaint No. 2016/9 - Possible threat to “Svaneti 1” Candidate Emerald Site (GE000012) from Nenskra Hydro Power Plant development (Georgia).

05.09.2018

DEAR MS OBREtenova,
DEAR MR HORY,
DEAR MS DE CUSSAC,
DEAR MEMBERS OF THE BUREAU,

We would like to thank you for all the information provided and the importance you give to the case. Hereby we send you an updated report by the complainant relevant to the complaint No. 2016/9.

As we already informed you, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) approved financing for the project for construction of Nenskra Hydro Power Plant. Construction of the main dam and the tunnels has not started because of protests from local Svan communities. In a declaration from March 2018 they insisted to be treated as indigenous people and no dam and mining projects to be carried on without their free prior informed consent (**Annex 1 - Svan declaration**).

In July 2018 a big flood occurred in the Nenskra River valley damaging severely many houses in Chuberi community and also destroying riparian habitats downstream from the proposed Nenskra dam site. Georgian NGOs asked for proper investigation of the case and noted that there could be a possibility preparation works for the construction of Nenskra Dam to have influenced the event (**Annex 2 - NGO Collective Statement**).

On 24th of August 2018 the Government of Georgia sent a letter to the Secretary of the Bern Convention regarding complaint No. 2016/9. We would like to thank the Government for the progress made in developing the Emerald Network. On the 4th of September 2018 we received from the Secretariat the Standard Data Forms (SDF) and borders of 3 so-called "compensatory" sites (**Annex 3 - maps of three compensation sites**). We made an analysis of the quality of these sites in regard to the insufficient protection of 6 species and 15 habitats in the Alpine region of Georgia after the reduction of the Emerald sites "Svaneti" and "Racha" in the Western Great Caucasus.

Although sites GE0000057, GE0000058 and GE0000059 are an important asset for the Emerald Network they cannot compensate for the reduction of site GE0000012 Svaneti 1. The main reason is that in the "compensatory" sites there are no big rivers like Enguri and Nenskra (excluded completely from the Emerald Network). In the attached map are shown the length of Enguri (102 km) and

Nenskra (43 km) rivers within "Svaneti" site and the longest rivers within the "compensatory" sites (23 km, 17 km and 9 km respectively) (**Annex 4 - rivers length**).

Another important difference between Svaneti and the three sites is the high representativity of habitats and habitats of species in Svaneti due to lack of human interference in large areas. Forests in the upper Nenskra valley for example are inaccessible due to avalanches, mudflows and high river water. We would like to show you drone footage from the Nenskra Dam site to illustrate the pure wilderness of the area:

1. Nenskra HPP project site towards end of reservoir - https://youtu.be/mrRZ_UqxiiI
2. Nenskra HPP - towards Dam <https://youtu.be/QLnODufYW2E>
3. Nenskra HPP - footage from 500 metres - <https://youtu.be/sBJaGDJiREE>
4. Towards Dam - <https://youtu.be/AEg5O4RrpIw>
5. Nenskra HPP - Lower altitude flight over planned reservoir - <https://youtu.be/opsbcSlvCSQ>
6. Workers Camp - Downstream of Dam <https://youtu.be/WulxQerOHMU>
7. Nenskra Downstream - <https://youtu.be/Yh9eKoZEKVo>
8. Avalanches on right Bank Towards Dam <https://youtu.be/1t6aUpOKg6o>

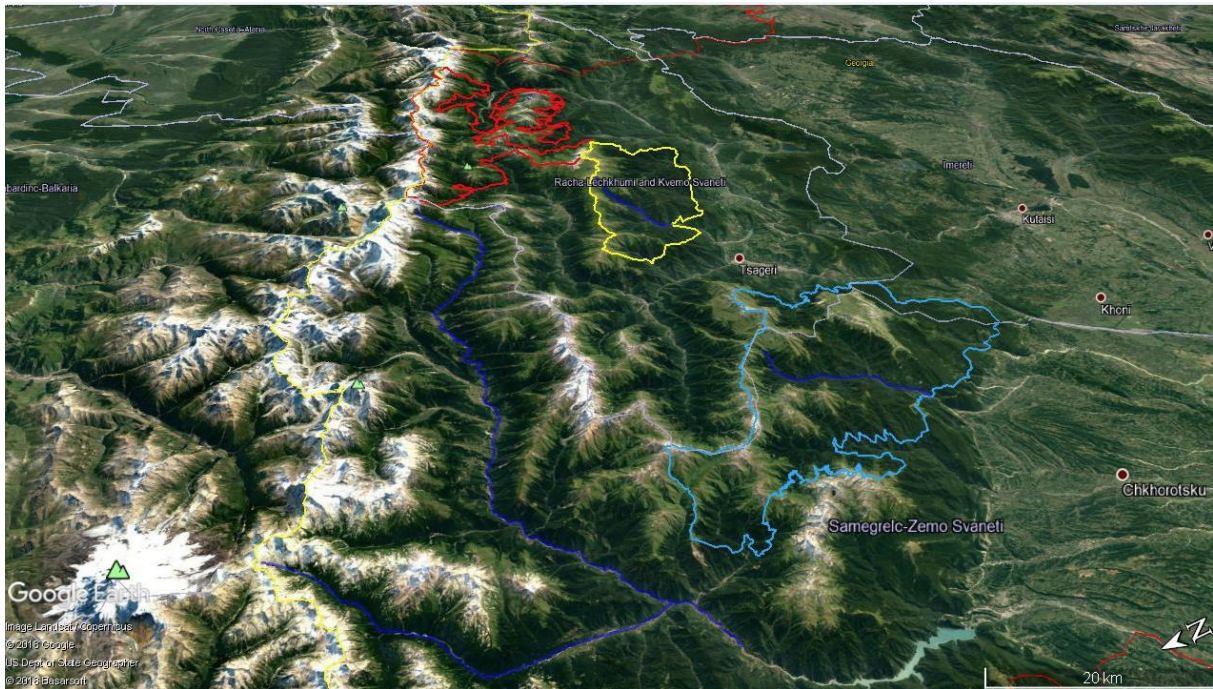
In the table attached we present the assessment for the species and habitats assessed with IN MOD or IN MAJ in the Alpine Region of Georgia during the Biogeographical Seminar in Tbilisi 2017 (**Annex 5- species and habitats 2015-2017**). For 3 species partial compensation is possible and for 3 more - compensation is not possible (greater horseshoe bat, otter, Alpine longhorn beetle). For 7 habitats there is no compensation at all, for 4 habitats compensation is not possible with these sites. For 3 sites there is partial compensation and only for 1 habitat there is enough compensation.

Concerned about possible construction start leading to destruction of habitats and species, noting protests of indigenous Svan communities against hydropower development, aware of the lack of strategic planning for hydropower development in Georgia, aware of insufficient quality of the three newly proposed "compensation" sites, we call for an urgent on-the-spot assessment to Svaneti and including the case in the agenda of the Standing Committee for 2018. Furthermore, we ask you to send a letter to EBRD and EIB requesting that no disbursements are made until the complaint is resolved, in order to ensure that Georgia's obligations under the Bern Convention are met.

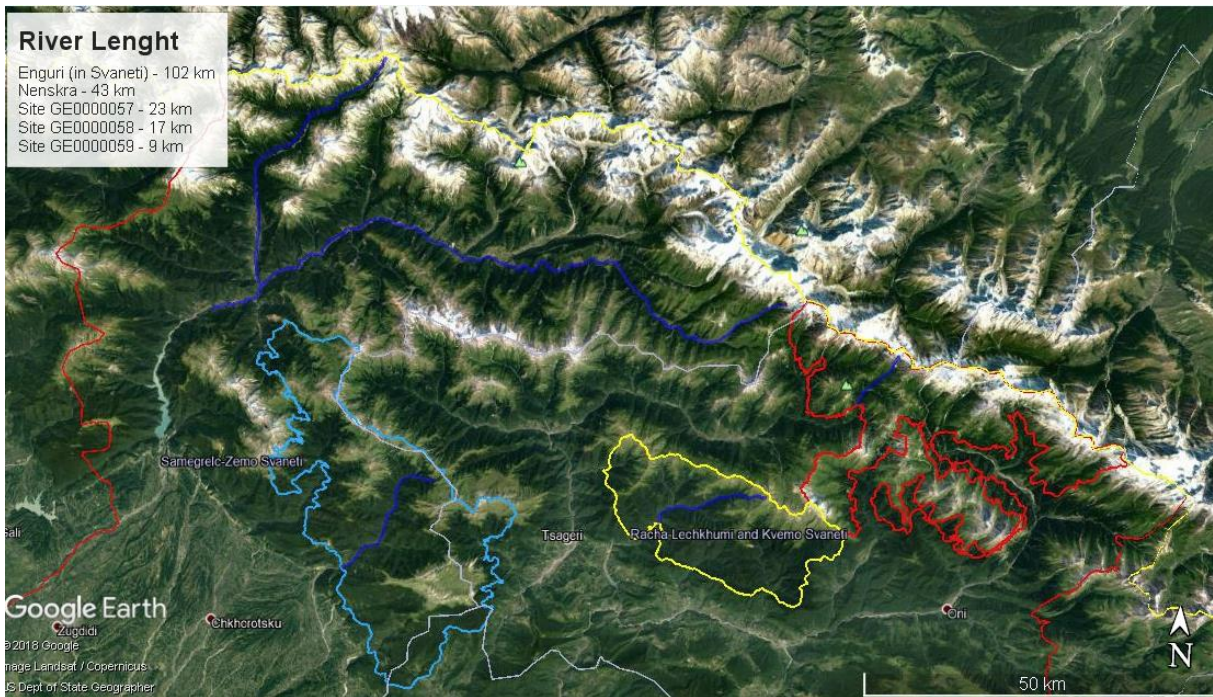
Best regards,

Mr David Chipashvili - Association Green Alternative – complainant
Mr Andrey Ralev - Balkani Wildlife Society - biodiversity expert

Appendices



Compensation sites



River length

Species present in GE0000012 Svaneti 1 and assessed as IN MOD or IN MAJ in 2017															
Species code	English name	Latin name	Assessment 2015 Georgia Alpine	Assessment 2017 Georgia Alpine	Population SDF Svaneti 2015	Population Svaneti NGO Ass.	Population SDF-GE0000057	Population SDF-GE0000058	Population SDF-GE0000059	Global Assessment SDF Svaneti 2015	Global Assessment Svaneti NGO Ass.	Global Assessment SDF-GE0000057	Global Assessment SDF-GE0000058	Global Assessment SDF-GE0000059	NGO Comments 2018
1303	Lesser horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>	IN MOD	IN MOD	B	B	C	C	C	B	B	C	C	C	Partial compensation
1304	Greater horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus ferrumequinum</i>	SUF	IN MOD	B	B	C	C	C	B	B	C	C	C	One key site (B) cannot be compensated by 2 C sites
1354	Brown bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>	SUF	IN MOD	B	B	C	C	C	B	B	C	C	C	Partial compensation
1355	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	IN MOD	IN MOD	B	B	C	C	C	B	B	C	C	C	1 key site (B) cannot be compensated by sites with no big rivers
1361	Lynx ¹	<i>Lynx lynx</i>	SUF	IN MOD	B	B	C	C	C	B	B	C	C	C	Partial compensation
1087	Alpine longhorn beetle	<i>Rosalia alpina</i>	IN MIN	IN MOD	B	B	C	C	C	B	B	C	C	C	One key site (B) cannot be compensated by 2 C sites
Habitats present in GE0000012 Svaneti 1 and assessed as IN MOD or IN MAJ in 2017															
Habitat code	English name		Assessment 2015 Georgia Alpine	Assessment 2017 Georgia Alpine	Representativity SDF Svaneti 2015	Representativity Svaneti NGO Ass.	Representativity SDF-GE0000057	Representativity SDF-GE0000058	Representativity SDF-GE0000059	Relative surface SDF Svaneti 2015	Relative surface Svaneti NGO Ass.	Relative surface SDF-GE0000057	Relative surface SDF-GE0000058	Relative surface SDF-GE0000059	NGO Comments 2018
C3.55	Sparsely vegetated river gravel banks		IN MAJ	IN MOD	A	P	P	P		B	P	P	P	P	1 key site cannot be compensated by sites with no big rivers
C3.62	Unvegetated river gravel banks		IN MAJ	IN MOD	A	P	P	P		B	P	P	P	P	1 key site cannot be compensated by sites with no big rivers
E2.3	Mountain hay meadows		-	IN MOD	A					B					No compensation at all
E4.3	Acid alpine and subalpine grassland		-	IN MAJ	A					B					No compensation at all
E5.4	Moist or wet tall-herb and fern fringes and meadows		-	IN MAJ	B					B					No compensation at all
E5.5	Subalpine moist tall herb and fern stands		-	IN MAJ	A					B					No compensation at all
F2.22	Alpine acidocline <i>Rhododendron</i> heaths		-	IN MAJ	B					A					No compensation at all
F9.1	Riverine scrub		IN MIN	IN MOD	C	A			C	B	B			C	1 key site cannot be compensated by sites with no big rivers
G1.11	Riverine <i>Salix</i> woodlands		-	IN MAJ	B					B					No compensation at all
G1.21	Riverine <i>Fraxinus</i> - <i>Alnus</i> woodland		SR	IN MOD	A			C		B				B	1 key site cannot be compensated by sites with no big rivers
G1.6	<i>Fagus</i> woodland		SUF	IN MOD	B	A	B	B	C	A	A	B	B	B	Partial compensation
G1.A1	<i>Quercus</i> - <i>Fraxinus</i> - <i>Carpinus</i> woodland		IN MAJ	IN MOD	C	C				C	C				Similar quality of sites for this habitat
G1.A4	Ravine and slope woodland		IN MAJ	IN MOD	A	C				B	B				Svaneti is more representative site for this habitat
G3.17	Balkano-Pontic <i>Abies</i> forests		IN MIN	IN MOD	A		B	B		A		B	B		Partial compensation
G3.1H	<i>Picea orientalis</i> forests		IN MOD	IN MOD	A					A					No compensation at all

* In blue riparian species and habitats

Species present in GE0000012 Svaneti1 and assessed as IN MOD or IN MAJ in 2017

- February 2018 –

SUBJECT: COMPLAINT NO. 2016/9 - POSSIBLE THREAT TO “SVANETI 1” CANDIDATE EMERALD SITE (GE0000012) FROM NENSKRA HYDRO POWER PLANT DEVELOPMENT (GEORGIA)

Hereby we send you an update by the complainant relevant to the Complaint No. 2016/9 - Possible threat to “Svaneti 1” Candidate Emerald Site (GE0000012).

On the 31st of January 2018 the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development approved loan¹ and equity² investment totaling USD 229 million for the construction of the Nenskra Hydro Power Plant. On the 6th of February the European Investment Bank also approved financing for the project³.

In view of the approved loans for the Nenskra project, we call for an urgent on-the-spot assessment to the area before construction starts. Furthermore, we ask you to send a letter to the banks requesting that no disbursements are made until the complaint is resolved, in order to ensure that Georgia’s obligations under the Convention are met.

During the Biogeographical Seminar held in Tbilisi in November 2017 experts agreed that the reduction of the Emerald sites "Svaneti" and "Racha" in the Western Great Caucasus has led to insufficient protection of 7 species and 15 habitats in the Alpine region of Georgia. The developments are especially worrying for brown bear (*Ursus arctus*), Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*), greater horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*), Alpine longhorn beetle (*Rosalia alpina*), Caucasian *Fagus* forests (G1.6H), Nordmann's fir forests (G3.173), Riverine scrub (F9.1) and Ponto-Caucasian montane *Alnus* galleries (G1.127). Their ‘sufficient’ status of 2015 was changed to ‘insufficient moderate’ after areas such as Nenskra and Nakra valleys threatened by Nenskra Hydro Power Plant were excluded from the Emerald Network.

We would like to add up additional data about the uniqueness of Nenskra and Nakra valleys:

1. The upper part of Nenskra and Nakra valleys (with Nenskra Dam and Nakra Weir locations) were included in the strict nature protection zone of **Upper Svaneti National Park** as it was planned for declaration in 2008 (see map in **Annex 1**). According to the Draft Management Plan Svaneti Protected Areas (**Annex 2**): "*The following ecosystem components, shown on Figure 3.4, are typical for the forest belt:*

III-2 upper forest and sub-alpine belt ecosystems of the upper reaches of r. Nenskra;

III-3 forest ecosystems of r. Nakra;

III-4 forest ecosystems of r. Kasleti and Khaishura;

III-5 coniferous forest ecosystems of the northern slope of the Svaneti ridge."

The Georgian Government didn't declare the national park for 10 years already and all the territory of Svaneti remains unprotected.

2. The Western Great Caucasus is the only place in temperate Eurasia with intact forests according to the **The Intact Forest Landscape** (IFL)⁴ project, with a mapping team composed by Greenpeace, Global Forest Watch, Transparent World, The Global Land Analysis and Discovery (GLAD) laboratory in the Department of Geographical Sciences at the University of Maryland, WWF Russia, Luonto Liitto (Finnish Nature League) and Forest Watch Indonesia. The Nenskra and Nakra valleys are an essential part of this area of intact forests (see map in **Annex 3**). According to the project:

¹ Project Summary Document: <http://www.ebrd.com/work-with-us/projects/psd/nenskra-hpp.html>

² Project Summary Document: <http://www.ebrd.com/work-with-us/projects/esia/nenskra-hpp-portage.html>

³ EIB press release, <http://www.eib.org/infocentre/press/releases/all/2018/2018-030-eib-backs-eur-6-5-billion-energy-sme-transport-and-urban-investment.htm>

⁴ <http://www.intactforests.org/world.map.html>

"Intact Forest Landscape (IFL) is a seamless mosaic of forest and naturally treeless ecosystems within the zone of current forest extent, which exhibit no remotely detected signs of human activity or habitat fragmentation and is large enough to maintain all native biological diversity, including viable populations of wide-ranging species. IFLs have high conservation value and are critical for stabilizing terrestrial carbon storage, harboring biodiversity, regulating hydrological regimes, and providing other ecosystem functions."

3. In the book **Local Flora (Plant Life of Georgia)**, Batumi, 2000 the authors Revaz Gagnidze and Murman Davitadze highlight the importance of Nenskra and Nakra valleys as key areas in the floristic district of Svaneti. On page 43: *"Major part of the Floristic area of Svaneti is covered by dark coniferous forests. Forest with evergreen undergrowth is well preserved in Tkheish-Khumpreri and Nenskra-Nakra valleys."* (**Annex 4** in Georgian). Several species of endemic plants with very limited distribution are present in both valleys. On page 46: *"From Abkhazian limestone flora in Nenskra valley *Leptopus colchicus* is present, for alpine meadows *Pulsatilla aurea*, *Ranunculus lojkae*, etc."* On page 47: *"Endemic species of Svaneti flora are: 1. *Cirsium albowanum* discovered by Italian scientists Sommier and Levier is spread in Nenskra and Tkheishi valleys."*

4. The checklist of **Rare, Endangered and Vulnerable Plants of the Republic of Georgia**⁵ includes 64 species of plants important for conservation in Svaneti, most of them endemic to the Caucasus or local endemics. This checklist was prepared by the Institute of Botany and the Botanical Garden of the Georgian Academy of Sciences in collaboration with the Missouri Botanical Garden and the authors Marina Eristavi, Tatyana Shulkina, Shalva Sikhuralidze and Lamara Asieshvili say *"Conservation International recently designated the Caucasus as one of its 25 global "[biodiversity hotspots](#)" (Currently 36 global "[biodiversity hotspots](#)"⁶) because of the area's exceptional number of endemic species (those found nowhere else) and the high degree of threat to those species. The number of endemic vascular plant species in the Caucasus approaches 1600 (0.5% of the world's 300,000 plant species) and only ten percent of the region's natural vegetation remains. With destruction of habitats occurring at a critically rapid pace throughout the Caucasus (...)"*. The Nenskra Hydro Power Project would add up to the destruction of habitats and important populations of endemic plants could be lost (flooding by the dam) or degraded (changes in microclimate conditions in gorges), but not detailed mapping or assessment of impacts was made before project approval.

During the Biogeographical Seminar the Georgian Government representative spoke about 3 compensation sites it is planning to propose, but these sites did not include big rivers and could not compensate the loss of Nenskra River. As these sites were not officially proposed and evaluated we are ready to submit an updated Standard Data Form of "Svaneti 1" Candidate Emerald Site including the most valuable areas of proposed Upper Svaneti National Park, areas of intact forests and locations of endemic species with limited distribution.

Additionally we would like to we ask you to send a letter to the Georgian Government to produce a Strategic Impact Assessment on hydropower development in potential and proposed Emerald sites. The Government has done almost no efforts to protect riverine and riparian species and habitats in the Emerald Network up to now. The final conclusions of the Biogeographical Seminar held in Tbilisi in November 2017 show that out of 81 conclusions for these species and habitats in the 3 regions of Georgia 41% are 'scientific reserve', 36% are 'insufficient major' or 'insufficient moderate' and only 23% are 'sufficient' or 'insufficient minor'.

Best regards,

David Chipashvili - Green Alternative – Complainant

Mr Andrey Ralev - Balkani Wildlife Society - Biodiversity expert

⁵ <http://www.mobot.org/MOBOT/research/georgia/cfamily.shtml>

⁶ In 2005, an additional analysis brought the total number of biodiversity hotspots to 34, based on the work of nearly 400 specialists. In 2011, the Forests of East Australia was identified as the 35th hotspot by a team of researchers from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) working with Conservation International. In February 2016, the North American Coastal Plain was recognized as meeting the criteria and became the Earth's 36th hotspot. <https://www.cepf.net/our-work/biodiversity-hotspots/hotspots-defined>



Intact Forest Landscapes

Home World's IFL Map Data Publications

Key Findings On-line IFL Map

Map Layers Share

Nenskra HPP

Map showing Intact Forest Landscapes (IFL) in Georgia and surrounding regions. The map includes labels for cities like Tuapse, Sochi, Adler, Cherkessk, Pyatigorsk, Kislovodsk, Nalchik, Grozny, Vladikavkaz, Kutaisi, Poti, Batumi, Tbilisi, and Rustavi. The IFL areas are highlighted in green, and a black arrow points to a specific area labeled 'Nenskra HPP'.