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**Presumed negative impact of developments on the Vjosa river
including hydro-power plant development and Vlora
International Airport
(Albania)**

- COMPLAINANT REPORT -

Document prepared by the Government of the Republic of Albania

**Update for the Autumn Bureau Meeting
August 2026**

Progress Report of the Government of the Republic of Albania
Complaint No. 2016/05 - Albania: Presumed negative impact of developments on the
Vjosa river, including hydropower plant and Vlora International Airport
Implementation of Recommendation No. 219 (2023)

Abstract

This report is submitted in response to the Bureau's letter of 15 July 2026 concerning Complaint No. 2016/05 and the implementation of Recommendation No. 219 (2023). Albania reiterates its commitment to the objectives of the Bern Convention and to continued constructive cooperation with the Secretariat, the Bureau, the European Commission, civil society and scientific institutions. The report clarifies the current legal and procedural context of the Emerald Network in Albania, noting that the historical Vjosa-Narta Candidate Emerald Site does not correspond to a single protected area under the current national legal framework, but overlaps with different conservation instruments, including the Vjosa Wild River National Park and the Pishë Poro-Nartë Protected Landscape. Without prejudice to this clarification, Albania acknowledges the ecological importance of the area and the need for environmental assessment of projects likely to have significant effects on habitats, species and conservation values. Albania will undertake a comprehensive review of the proposed Emerald Network, including updated Standard Data Forms and revised cartographic information. The report also provides updated information on the Vlora International Airport and the proposed Zvërnec development. The latter remains a preliminary proposal and is subject to an in-depth Environmental Impact Assessment, with activities suspended pending completion of the legally required assessment, consultation and decision-making procedures. The competent authorities will require the assessment of cumulative impacts, including interactions with existing and planned developments in the wider Vjosa-Narta area. Albania remains open to dialogue on the feasibility, scope and timing of a possible on-the-spot appraisal and will continue to strengthen cooperation with civil society organisations, including EcoAlbania and PPNEA.

1. Introduction

In response to the Bureau's letter of 15 July 2026 concerning Complaint No. 2016/05 and the implementation of Recommendation No. 219 (2023), the Government of the Republic of Albania wishes to provide the following information and clarifications regarding the matters raised by the Bureau, based on the current legal, institutional and factual circumstances.

The Government of Albania expresses its sincere appreciation to the Secretariat of the Bern Convention and to the Bureau of the Standing Committee for the continued constructive dialogue and cooperation regarding the implementation of Recommendation No. 219 (2023). Albania remains firmly committed to the objectives and principles of the Bern Convention and to fulfilling the obligations arising therefrom, while continuing to strengthen biodiversity conservation through its national legal and institutional framework.

2. Legal and procedural context of the Emerald Network

Before addressing the specific issues referred to in the Bureau's letter, Albania considers it important to clarify the legal and procedural context of the Emerald Network process as it applies to the country. The identification of potential Emerald Network sites in Albania was carried out primarily during the period 2002-2008, based on the scientific knowledge, legal framework and institutional arrangements existing at that time. Following those assessments, several areas were proposed as Candidate Emerald Sites. However, the Emerald Network constitution process for Albania has not yet been completed and none of the proposed sites have been formally adopted by the Standing Committee as Emerald Network sites. Consequently, the relevant areas remain at the stage of proposed Candidate Emerald Sites and have not acquired the status of officially adopted Emerald Network sites under the Bern Convention.

During the two decades that have elapsed since those initial assessments, Albania has undertaken significant legal, institutional and scientific reforms in the field of biodiversity conservation. These include the introduction of the Hunting Moratorium in 2014 and the Forest Moratorium in 2016, the establishment of the National Agency of Protected Areas in 2015, the adoption of Law No. 81/2017 "On Protected Areas", the establishment of the Vjosa Wild River National Park in 2023, and the designation in 2025 of the Vjosa Valley as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve under the Man and the Biosphere Programme. In parallel, Albania has initiated the process for the inclusion of the Vjosa protected area system in the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas. Scientific knowledge concerning habitats, protected species, ecological connectivity and conservation priorities has also advanced substantially.

These developments have transformed Albania's protected area system compared with the situation that existed when the proposed Emerald inventories were originally prepared. Albania will therefore undertake a comprehensive review of the proposed Emerald Network, including the reassessment of existing Candidate Emerald Sites, the preparation of updated Standard Data Forms and the development of revised cartographic information, in accordance with the standards and requirements of the Bern Convention. This review will ensure that the proposed Emerald Network reflects the current legal framework, updated scientific knowledge and the present protected area system.

3. Vjosa-Narta, Pishë Poro-Nartë and environmental assessment

References to the proposed "Vjosa-Narta Candidate Emerald Site" should not be interpreted as corresponding to a single existing protected area under the current Albanian legal framework. Today, the territory concerned is managed through different protected area designations established under distinct legal acts and conservation objectives, including the Vjosa Wild River National Park and the Pishë Poro-Nartë Protected Landscape. These are separate legal conservation instruments within the national protected area system and cannot be considered equivalent to the historical boundaries of the proposed Candidate Emerald Site.

Without prejudice to this legal and procedural clarification, Albania acknowledges the ecological importance of the area and the need to ensure that projects likely to have significant effects on habitats, species or conservation values are subject to appropriate environmental assessment, including cumulative impact assessment where relevant.

Albania fully recognizes the importance of updating the Standard Data Forms and welcomes the support offered by the Secretariat of the Bern Convention in this regard. The competent

national authorities have already initiated the broader process related to Natura 2000 preparation, including updated assessments of habitats and species. Albania looks forward to continuing cooperation with the Secretariat during the preparation of the updated Standard Data Forms and, where appropriate, in relation to biodiversity-related aspects of environmental assessment.

4. Vlora International Airport

With regard to the Vlora International Airport, Albania wishes to reiterate that the project is located outside the boundaries of the “Pishë Poro-Nartë” Protected Landscape, as designated by Council of Ministers Decision No. 596 of 25 September 2024, and therefore does not fall within any protected area designated under the current national protected areas system. The project underwent the Environmental Impact Assessment procedure in accordance with the applicable national legislation and received Environmental Declaration No. AN281120210002 of 6 December 2021, issued by the National Environment Agency.

Albania takes note of the concerns expressed by the Bureau and the Standing Committee regarding potential effects in the wider Vjosa-Narta area. The competent authorities will continue to consider the relevant conservation values of the area in accordance with the applicable national legal framework and Albania’s obligations under the Bern Convention.

5. Proposed development on Zvërnec

Regarding the proposed development on Zvërnec, Albania wishes to clarify that the project remains at the stage of a preliminary development proposal. Following the preliminary screening procedure, the Ministry of Environment and the National Environment Agency determined, in accordance with the applicable national legislation, that the proposed project must undergo the in-depth Environmental Impact Assessment procedure. Accordingly, all activities within the proposed project area remain suspended pending completion of the in-depth EIA procedure, including all legally required assessment, consultation and decision-making processes.

Pursuant to Council of Ministers Decision No. 686 of 29 July 2015, the developer is legally responsible for preparing the in-depth Environmental Impact Assessment Report, organizing the public hearing and submitting the final in-depth Environmental Impact Assessment Report, together with a summary of the public consultation process, to the Ministry of Environment. Public consultation is a mandatory component of the in-depth EIA procedure. Upon submission of the required documentation, the Ministry of Environment and the National Environment Agency will review the documentation and carry out the assessment in accordance with the procedures prescribed by national legislation, prior to the issuance of any Environmental Declaration.

Albania confirms that, within the in-depth EIA procedure for the proposed Zvërnec development, the competent authorities will require the assessment of cumulative impacts, including, where relevant, interactions with existing and planned developments in the wider Vjosa-Narta area, such as the Vlora International Airport. This assessment will address potential effects on habitats, species, ecological connectivity, protected areas and areas of conservation importance.

6. Permits and procedural steps

The current status of the main projects referred to in the Bureau's letter is summarized below:

Project	Current status	Permit / decision	Procedure undertaken	Pending steps
Vlora International Airport	Outside the Pishë Poro-Nartë Protected Landscape under the current national designation.	Environmental Declaration No. AN281120210002, dated 6 December 2021.	Environmental Impact Assessment procedure under national legislation.	Implementation and monitoring of the applicable environmental requirements and mitigation measures, where relevant.
Zvërnec tourism proposal	Preliminary development proposal only. Activities remain suspended pending completion of the in-depth EIA procedure.	No final Environmental Declaration has been issued at this stage.	Preliminary screening completed; in-depth EIA required.	In-depth EIA, public hearing, submission of the final EIA report, review by the Ministry of Environment and the National Environment Agency, and final decision-making.

7. Cartographic information and Annex I

A map showing the current national protected areas and the historical boundaries of the proposed Vjosa–Narta candidate Emerald site is submitted as Annex I to this report. Regarding the proposed Zvërnec development project, the competent authorities have requested an in-depth Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which has not yet been submitted. Consequently, the precise project location and boundaries cannot be provided at this stage. Once the complete application and accompanying EIA documentation are received, the relevant information, including the precise project location, will be transmitted to the Bern Convention Secretariat without delay.

8. Possible on-the-spot appraisal and cooperation with civil society

Albania takes note of the Bureau's reference to a possible on-the-spot appraisal. The competent authorities remain open to continued dialogue with the Secretariat on the feasibility, scope and timing of such a visit, taking into account the ongoing national procedures and the need to ensure that any visit is useful, well-prepared and technically focused.

Albania also takes note of the Standing Committee's call for strengthened cooperation with civil society organisations, including EcoAlbania and PPNEA. The Ministry remains committed to ensuring meaningful opportunities for participation in consultation processes and to maintaining constructive dialogue with civil society, scientific institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

9. Conclusion

The Government of Albania reiterates its commitment to the effective implementation of the Bern Convention and to the fulfilment of the obligations arising therefrom. Albania will continue the process of updating the Emerald Network documentation, including Standard Data Forms and cartographic information, and will ensure that ongoing and future environmental assessment procedures take into account the conservation values of the Vjosa-Narta area, cumulative impacts and the relevant obligations under the Bern Convention.

Albania remains committed to active engagement with the Secretariat of the Bern Convention, the Bureau of the Standing Committee, the European Commission, civil society organisations and scientific institutions, while further strengthening biodiversity conservation and environmental governance in the country.