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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee
45th meeting
Strasbourg, 8-12 December 2025

Bureau of the Standing Committee
16-18 September 2025
Strasbourg

New complaint: 2024/5

**Alleged threat to habitat and protected species from the
'Upper Horizons' Hydropower Project (Bosnia and
Herzegovina)**

- GOVERNMENT REPORT -

Document prepared by Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Bern Convention Secretariat
Directorate of Democratic Participation
Council of Europe
Avenue de l'Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France**

SUBJECT: Complaint 2024/05 – Alleged Threat to Habitat and Protected Species from the Gornji Horizonti Hydropower Project, STATEMENT, Submitted
(Reference: Your document T-PVS/Files(2025)2024-5 of 14 May 2025)

The Statement prepared by Dejan Radosevic, Bern Convention National Focal Point for Bosnia and Herzegovina
Banja Luka, 29th July 2025

In September 2024, the Secretariat of the Bern Convention received a new complaint. The complainants allege threat to habitat and protected species from the 'Upper Horizons' Hydropower Project, which would violate provisions of the Convention.

BiH, and specifically the Republika Srpska entity, has violated Articles 3, 4, 5, 7 and 10 of the Bern Convention by approving the construction of the Upper Horizons hydropower scheme (Gornji Horizonti). It is currently building the first of three planned large hydroelectric plants, namely Dabar on the Zalomka River, with an installed capacity of 159.15 MW. The Nevesinje (60 MW) and Bileća (33 MW) plants are also planned. Upper Horizons was originally conceived in the mid-20th Century and its impacts will be extremely far-reaching. It is planned in a region characterized by complex karst hydrology and hydrogeology that is difficult to assess. Important technical decisions have been made on the basis of high uncertainty and as such carry a high risk of unplanned impacts. For the Dabar plant, between 2011 and 2021 the Republika Srpska authorities signed a concession agreement and issued almost all the necessary permits (environmental, water and most of the construction permits), based on a very poor quality environmental impact assessment (EIA) from 2012. In 2017 and 2022 the environmental permit was renewed, but no new EIA was carried out and the renewal process was not announced publicly. Thus, the public was denied the right to provide input.

On 9 June 2025, the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology was informed that a complaint had been submitted to the Secretariat of the Bern Convention by the Association “Resource Aarhus Center in B&H”, the Center for the Environment, RiverWatch, CEE Bankwatch Network, and EuroNatur concerning an alleged threat to habitat and protected species posed by the Gornji Horizonti hydropower project.

A case file has not been opened based on the complaint, but the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology has been requested to provide a statement regarding the allegations in the complaint, with a deadline for submission by 31 July 2025.

In view of the above, the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology provides the following statement:

The Gornji Horizonti project consists of three hydropower plants, among which the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment - Annex I-EIA_HPP_DABAR) procedure for the "Dabar" HPP was conducted in 2011/2012, and an environmental permit was issued in 2012. In accordance with the Law on Environmental Protection, the environmental permit was renewed in 2022. The key reason for implementing the Gornji Horizonti project lies in the fact that the project has been planned since 1976 (Annex I-EIA_HPP_DABAR). Its implementation enables the accumulation of part of the water during periods of intensive precipitation, in order to allow for its multipurpose use throughout the year and to fulfill the following essential objectives:

- to prevent (or minimize) the flooding of the Nevesinjsko polje, Dabarsko polje, and Fatničko polje (karst fields) in order to enable the local population to carry out agricultural and livestock activities without impediments,
- to retain water available for multipurpose use as long as possible,
- to enable irrigation of the above-mentioned karst fields,
- to enable irrigation of the Dubrave and Bilečko polje during the vegetation period,
- to resolve the water supply issue in this part of Herzegovina,
- to utilize part of these waters for energy production at the Gornji Horizonti power plants and downstream power plants that are already in operation,
- to increase the minimum flow of the Bregava River through Stolac,
- to establish a permanent watercourse through the Bilečko polje.
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Large elevation differences and relatively short distances between the locations where the hydropower plants are planned and the Adriatic Sea, as well as the fact that four karst fields (Nevesinjsko polje, Fatničko polje, Gatačko polje and Cerničko polje) lie on four elevation levels, allow the water to be used at multiple stages for energy generation (hydropower plants) and for hydromelioration of large areas in Eastern Herzegovina.

The environmental impact assessment procedure for the "Dabar" HPP was conducted transparently, with timely notification of the Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism and the Republic of Croatia, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context – the Espoo Convention ("Official Gazette of BiH – International Treaties", No. 08/09), whose provisions have been transposed into the Law on Environmental Protection ("Official Gazette of Republika Srpska", Nos. 71/12, 79/15, and 70/20).

To thoroughly assess inter-entity and international impacts of the project, a specialized institution from the Federation of BiH was engaged to prepare the segment of the Environmental Impact Study titled "Environmental Impact Study – Water Segment" for the "Dabar" HPP.

It is important to note that earlier research and scientific studies related to the Gornji Horizonti project strongly emphasized the application of the integrated water management concept. Recommendations followed, suggesting that project solutions be evaluated not only from a hydro-energy perspective but also for their effects in water supply, irrigation, flood protection, the socio-economic aspect of balanced regional development, environmental impacts, and other considerations. Moreover, previous studies concluded that different user interests in the system can

only be harmonized through integrated management over a wider area (basins of the Trebišnjica and Neretva rivers), in terms of both water quality and quantity.

Based on the above – especially the fact that the hydropower infrastructure of the Gornji Horizonti system has been planned since the mid-20th century – it is clear that all procedures have been carried out in accordance with spatial planning documentation (Annex II - Energy Sector_Spatial plan_BiH_1981-2000; Annex III - Energy Sector_Spatial plan_Republika Srpska_1996-2015; Annex IV - Energy Sector_Spatial plan_Republika Srpska_2015; Annex V - Energy Sector_Spatial plan_Republika Srpska_2025). The spatial plans from the currently valid Amendments to the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Srpska until 2025, back to the first one adopted after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, as well as the one preceding it (the Spatial Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina 1981–2000), all have been included the planned construction of the hydropower plants that are the subject of the complaint. This must be taken into account when discussing the purpose of the project area. This fact is also acknowledged by the complainants, who in their submission state: “Gornji Horizonti were originally envisioned in the mid-20th century and...” This observation must be considered when addressing the Gornji Horizonti system and should be respected when developing assumptions for alternative land uses.

In addition, the procedure for renewing the environmental permit was conducted fully in line with the provisions of the Law on Environmental Protection. Therefore, the allegation in the complaint that the renewal process was not publicly announced is unfounded. Specifically, the 2022 permit renewal procedure for the "Dabar" HPP was carried out in accordance with applicable regulations, and the decision was made public by posting it on the Ministry's website.

When it comes to the "Bileća" HPP, which is the second facility within the Gornji Horizonti system, the environmental impact assessment procedure is ongoing. The complainants – the Resource Aarhus Center in B&H and the Center for the Environment – are participating in this procedure, and the Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism and Montenegro have been duly notified in accordance with the provisions of the Espoo Convention, as transposed into the Law on Environmental Protection.

The allegations of the complainants regarding the positions of competent courts in legal proceedings related to the "Dabar" HPP are not relevant to this complaint. Judicial decisions are binding on the competent authorities, and the construction permits issued for the "Dabar" HPP facilities are valid. It is important to note that the reissued construction permits were issued in accordance with the legal interpretation of the court that ruled in the administrative dispute.

During the planning phase of the Gornji Horizonti project, the competent authorities did not possess the data on species and habitats mentioned in the submitted Complaint, nor during the proposal submission period for the candidate Emerald sites Dabarsko Polje (SiteCode: BA0000024) and Fatničko Polje (SiteCode: BA0000023). The official data forms for these sites, the so-called SDF forms (Emerald Standard Data Forms), do not contain information on species and habitats, except for three species in Fatničko Polje: A091 *Aquila chrysaetos*, 1352 *Canis lupus*, and A103 *Falco peregrinus*. Regarding recent data, the competent authorities have information about biodiversity research conducted in Fatničko and Dabarsko Polje, performed by Center for the Environment. Up to this moment, the data from those studies are not yet available to the competent authorities. We would like to note that we were not able to access the annexes mentioned in the document “New complaint: 2024/5 Alleged threat to habitat and protected species from the 'Upper Horizons' Hydropower Project Bosnia and Herzegovina” (T-PVS/Files(2025)2024-5\comp).

On this occasion, the competent ministry for the environment of the Republic of Srpska has provided a statement on this matter (Annex VI - The Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology_Statement).

We remain at your disposal for any additional information, hoping that this issue will be resolved in a manner that satisfies all parties involved.

The relevant annexes are:

[Annex I - EIA HPP DABAR](#)

[Annex II - Energy Sector Spatial plan BiH 1981-2000](#)

[Annex III - Energy Sector Spatial plan Republika Srpska 1996-2015](#)

[Annex IV - Energy Sector Spatial plan Republika Srpska 2015](#)

[Annex V - Energy Sector Spatial plan Republika Srpska 2025](#)

[Annex VI - The Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology Statement](#)