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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Bureau of the Standing Committee

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Open case-file: 2016/5

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

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

*Document prepared by the
Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Albania*



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENT

Tirana, 8 February 2024

Subject: Open File No. 2016/5: Albania: Presumed negative impact of developments on the Vjosa river including hydro-power plant development and Vlora International Airport

Dear Mr. Poutiers,

With reference to the recommendation 219 (2023) on the Presumed/possible impacts of infrastructure and urbanization developments particularly Vlora International airport as adopted I would like to report of the Government of Albania on this regard.

Following the Recommendation No. 219 (5th September 2023, revised 1st December 2023) on the possible impacts of infrastructure and urbanisation developments particularly Vlora International Airport on the Vjosa-Narta Protected Area (Albania), where the government was asked to respond to the information of the complainant, and to report on any progress in implementing Recommendation No.219rev (2023), please find below the following report:

With regard to implementation of the Ministerial Order No. 287, dated 26.09.2023, "On the establishment of the working group, on monitoring the measures undertaken for the verification of the implementation of the conditions as set in the Environmental Declaration for the project "Construction of the Vlorë International Airport", attached herewith, the summarized information regarding the verification conducted by the Directorate of Management, Monitoring, and Registry of Protected Areas at the National Agency of Protected Areas and conducted by the Inspection and Control Directorate at the National Agency of Environment and the Regional Environment Agencies of Fier, Vlorë, and Gjirokastrë, on the dates 30.10.2023, 04.12.2023, 16.01.2023, and 06.02.2024.

The entity "Vlora International Airport - VIA" sh.p.k. is equipped with Environmental Declaration AN-281120210002, dated 06.12.2021, issued by the National Environmental Agency for the development of the project "Construction of the Vlorë International Airport." The Environmental Declaration has been prepared in accordance with the Law No. 10440, dated 7.7.2011 "On Environmental Impact Assessment", as amended, Annex I, Point 7/b, which states that "Construction of airports with runways having a baseline length of 2,100 meters or more."

In the context of this law, "airport" implies airports that correspond to the definition given in the Chicago Convention of 1944, which established the International Civil Aviation Organization (Annex 14 of this convention).

The location where the project is developed falls in Cadaster Zone No. 1007, Property No. 6, Akërnj, Administrative Unit Novoselë, Vlorë, with an area of 309 hectares. Based on the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 694, dated 26.10.2022 "On changing the status and area of the natural/forested ecosystem "Pishë Poro-Nartë" from "Managed Natural Reserve" to "Protected Landscape" and removal of the status of "Protected Area" from the unchanged area," this area is outside the system of protected areas network.

However, due to the proximity to the Protected Landscape "Pishë Poro - Nartë" and the potential impact that the development of this activity may have on adjacent ecosystems, the working group, which included representatives from the National Agency of Protected Areas and Regional Protected Areas Agency, conducted on-site verification of the progress and implementation of the conditions of the Environmental Declaration.

From the on-site verification conducted by the working group, on the respective dates of 30.10.2023, 04.12.2023, 16.01.2023, and 06.02.2024, compared with the conditions set in the Environmental Declaration, it is found that, in general, the terms of the contract have been properly applied and specifically:

1. The entity has avoided works that are at a distance of no less than 600 meters from the nesting site from mid-May to July, to avoid disturbing the birds during their breeding period in these areas.
2. During the construction phase, the entity has completely avoided night work within a distance of up to 600 meters from the saltwork, as well as unnecessary illumination of the construction site, and also has used LED devices with low-angle lighting in those sectors where there is working activity.
3. Measures have been taken in the airport footprint area to deprive birds for nesting, for the period of March - April. For this purpose, it was instructed that with the approach of the nesting period, these measures should be reinstated by placing elements that prevent birds in the identified areas, such as scarecrows, scare balloons, and any other measure to ensure their non-installation in the area where the works are being carried out.
4. There are no discharges of polluted waters into the natural water bodies of the area.
5. Regarding the underpasses or corridors to solve the problem of animal migration, the entity, in collaboration with field specialists, was requested to identify the locations for the construction of underground passages (underpasses) to prevent habitat fragmentation. Regarding this point, the entity expressed that it cannot be implemented in the footprint area of the airport for technical reasons.

With regard to the evidence from long-term comprehensive data and the Wildlife Monitoring Programme, a periodic monthly monitoring of flora and fauna, has been carried out by the monitoring group of NAPA and RAPA Vlorë, by an observation conducted not only in the airport footprint but also in the larger area surrounding the airport, in order to identify the species of flora and fauna present in this territory. Monitoring is done by listing all the species of plants and shrubs installed, while for the fauna through direct observation, using trail cameras, and also the data obtained from the Waterfowl Census conducted on January 13, 2024.



Foto nr.1 Aeroporti dhe zona e monitorimit për rreth tij

The monitoring area covers approximately an area of about 1250 hectares (while only 309ha are related with the airport), which is located around the area where the airport is being constructed. This area includes agricultural land, inhabited areas, roads, and irrigation canals. The land is hilly and very poor in terms of vegetation.

Flora:

The majority of the area consists by saline lands which, in terms of biodiversity, present a very small number of herbaceous or shrubby vegetation. The identified installed species of herbaceous and shrubby vegetation are:

1. *Salicornia europea*;
2. *Tamarix parviflora*;
3. *Juncus maritimus-acutus*;
4. *Verbascum spp*;
5. *Erodium spp (moscatum)*;
6. *Scolymus maculatus (Thistle)*;
7. *Hordeum maritime (Sea barley)*.

The saline and agricultural lands around the airport are primarily used for cultivation today. Small areas near the village of Akèrni are cultivated with olive trees (*Olea europaea*).

A microhabitat for species such as *Phragmites australis*, *Typha angustifolia*, *Typha latifolia*, *Scirpus lacustris*, and *Scirpus maritimus* are the irrigation canals present in the monitoring area.





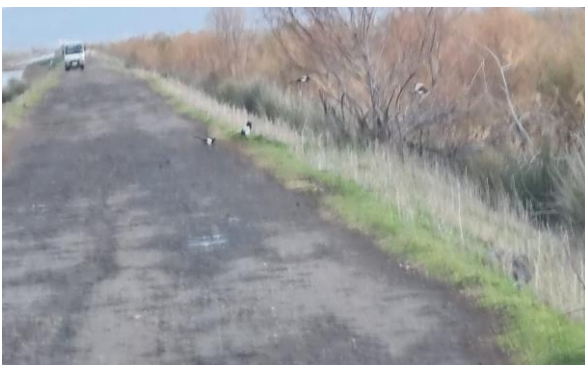
Saline lands with Juncus dhe Tamarix parviflorum

Fauna:

The birds observed through direct field observation during the 2024 census were in small numbers (species identified on the terrestrial surface of the saline lands around the airport:



Polygonet of Winter Waterbirds Census 2024



Lloji i shpendit “Blackbird”

The surface area of polygons 7 and 8, which includes the airport area and its surrounding zone, is approximately 910 hectares. According to the 2024 census, there were 608 birds out of a total of 10752 birds observed, accounting for 5.65% against the total. The main species observed were:

1. Common Buzzard (Buteo buteo);
2. Yellow-legged Gull (Larus michahellis);

3. Starling;
4. Blackbird.

According to the Environmental Declaration with AN281120210002 dated 06.12.2021, the entity "Vlora International Airport - VIA" sh.p.k possesses during the construction phase must respect the conditions set forth in this declaration.

The description, as applicable, of the main measures to be taken to avoid, reduce, and if possible, correct significant negative effects:

- 1- The entity is equipped with the relevant legal documentation for the construction of the Vlorë International Airport.
- 2- The entity in its self-monitoring report has not declared the discovery of cultural objects, archaeological traces, water sources, etc.
- 3- The entity has deposited inert waste (excavation debris) generated from excavations in the designated deposits determined by the technical director on both sides of the runway footprint and within the construction site territory. Inert waste (excavation debris) resulting from works on the construction site and deposited on both sides of the runway footprint will be reused for filling, levelling, and arrangements within the airport surface.
- 4- During on-site verifications, several locations were taken, and from the verification of the coordinates specified in the Environmental Declaration in the Asig Geoportal system, it was found that the entity works in the tracks defined according to the proposed project.
- 5- The entity has deposited inert waste (excavation debris) generated from excavations in the designated deposits determined by the technical director on both sides of the runway footprint and within the construction site territory. Inert waste (excavation debris) resulting from works on the construction site and deposited on both sides of the runway footprint will be reused for filling, levelling, and arrangements within the airport surface.
- 6- During on-site verifications within the construction site during this period, no damage to trees was observed, as within this area, no tree surfaces were noted.
- 7- According to the self-monitoring documentation submitted by the environmental studio preparing the periodic monitoring report, the specified norms in the Environmental Declaration for the noise levels generated by works at the construction site are respected, referring to Law No. 9774 dated 12.07.2007 "On the assessment and management of noise in the environment" as well as Directive No. 8, dated 27.11.2007 "On the threshold levels of noise in certain environments".
- 8- From on-site verifications, it was found that during this time, fencing has been realized in the southwest part of the footprint as well as in the entrance part.
- 9- According to the documentation submitted by the environmental studio preparing the periodic monitoring report, it results that during the works, the specified norms in the Environmental Declaration for air discharges are respected, referring to Law No. 162/2014 "On the protection of air quality in the environment" and DCM No. 248, dated 24.03.2003 "On the approval of temporary norms for air discharges and their implementation". The entity is tasked with ensuring the spraying of the exit roads of heavy machinery to minimize and keep within parameters air pollution.
- 10- The entity has deposited inert waste (excavation debris) generated from excavations in the designated deposits determined by the technical director on both sides of the runway footprint and within the construction site territory. Inert waste (excavation debris) resulting from works on the construction site and deposited on both sides of the runway footprint will be reused for filling, levelling, and arrangements within the airport surface. During on-site verifications, no water sources were observed on the construction site surface.
- 11- The entity declares that during the development of works on the construction site, there have been no technical interventions with negative consequences on the environment.
- 12- From on-site verifications, it resulted that the entity has built sewerage networks for the management of surface water throughout the perimeter of the construction surface.
- 13- From on-site verifications, it resulted that the entity has placed informative/signalling boards inside the construction site to avoid accidents/incidents during the works.
- 14- The entity declares that there have been no accidents or defects causing pollution to the environment.

- 15- The entity does not generate polluted waters from works on the construction site; as for wastewater, the entity is connected to the network of sewage of the local unit.
- 16- The entity declares that it has not carried out and does not carry out activities during the night hours on the construction site.
- 17- The entity is in the construction phase. Landscape rehabilitation in the project footprint will be carried out upon completion of the construction phase.
- 18- The entity carries out construction activities within the project footprint.






We clarify that during the period of verifications conducted by the working group, the entity has not made substantial changes in relation to the footprint of project, as in this phase of the works, it is carrying out the levelling, filling of the runway, and the construction of the airport terminal.


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