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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

40th meeting
Strasbourg, 30 November - 4 December 2020

Specific Sites - Files open

**Presumed negative impact of hydro-power
plant development on the Vjosa river
(Albania)**

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

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

Tirana, 20.08.2020

**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
RECOMMENDATION NO. 202 (2018) OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE,
ON THE PLANNED HYDRO-POWER PLANT DEVELOPMENTS ON THE VJOSA
RIVER (ALBANIA)**

Pursuant to the Recommendation No. 202 (2018) of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention and the Open File 2016/5: Albania: presumed negative impact of hydro-power plant development on the Vjosa river, the state-of-play for the reporting period since the beginning of 2020 stands as follows:

- Regarding planned HPP Pöcem, as informed previously work is suspended following the decision of the Administrative Court of 2017. The Decision of the Administrative Court of Appeal is still pending, and meanwhile **works remains suspended** for this project.
- For Kalivac HPP, after the initial application for the preliminary EIA was filed in late 2019 to the National Environment Agency (through the on-line system introduced in early 2019), and according to the information provided by NEA, the public hearing took place in Memaliaj on 22.01.2020. Links to the notification for this meeting by NEA can be found on-line at the following address: <http://www.akm.gov.al/assets/ayen-alb%2c-yigit-arman%2c-ndertim-hec-kalivacit%2c-gjirokaster.pdf>, as well as a summary of the main findings of the preliminary EIA.

After that the developer has applied, in accordance with the national legal framework on EIA, on 2nd April 2020 for the Environmental Declaration.

NEA informed that after the initial screening of the dossier (of around 500 pages), more detailed information was required to the developer, in order to ensure a full assessment of the project. Due to the current situation with COVID-19 restrictions in place in the country, since the beginning of March 2020, and thus working on-line from home, the dossier is still being considered and so far no decision has been taken by NEA for the Environmental Declaration. **Furthermore there is no work on the site of the project.**

In summary, we underline that neither Kalivaç, nor Pöcem HPPs, have started any work for the construction phase.

- Updating the information on the management of water resources in Albania the Water Sector Planning Document is completed last year. As for the feasibility study for Vjosa river, being prepared with the support of the EUSIWM (EU funded project), the latest information from them is that due to delays as the result of the COVID-19 measures in place in the country, there is a delay of at least 6 months for the completion of the document, which is now expected to be finished by the end of September 2020. After that the second phase will be the elaboration of Vjosa river management plan document.
- Regarding the issue of the Protected Areas Network revision and confirmation in Albania, as informed earlier in December 2019, a detailed study was completed by the National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA) with the assistance of the NATURAL (IPA 2017 EU funded project) and in compliance with the IUCN guidelines and expertise of IUCN regional office of Belgrade.

The study provided proposals for the GIS boundaries and reliable coverage of the existing Protected Areas network (due to inconsistencies with the PAs data and boundaries of those declared before 2010). The study was planned to be approved by the National Territory Council, that will be followed by a Decision of the Council of Ministers', in accordance with the national legal framework on Protected Areas in Albania (Law "On Protected Areas", no. 41/2017, of 4.5.2017, as its by-laws).

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment and its dependent agencies: National Environment Agency and its Regional Directorates of Environment of Gjirokastra and Vlora districts, the National Agency of Protected Areas and its Regional Directorates of Protected Areas of Vlora and Gjirokaster, State Inspectorate of Environment – since June 2020 under NEA, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, and in cooperation with the National Agency of Natural Resources and with the assistance of EUSIWM, are all following the procedures closely and are committed to implement measures required by the Recommendation no. 202 (2018) of the Standing Committee..

We will keep you updated on news and developments before the next Standing Committee meeting.

**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATION NO. 202 (2018)
OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE, ON THE PLANNED HYDRO-POWER PLANT DEVELOPMENTS
ON THE VJOSA RIVER (ALBANIA)**

Pursuant to the Recommendation No. 202 (2018) of the Standing Committee, on the planned hydro-power plant developments on the Vjosa river, and the Decision of SC of December 2019, please find below the Progress Report up to 20.2.2020:

1. The Ministry of Tourism and Environment has been engaged with an active participation at the scientific seminars that took place during 2019 in Tirana, for the presentation of the scientific data of Albanian experts and those of Vienna University.
2. Regarding the Vjosa River Management Plan, this is planned to be prepared with the support of EU SIWM project, in close cooperation with the National Agency of Water Resources. The first phase consisting on inception part was planned for December 2019, but it is delayed with few months due to the delays in the procedures completion. The Ministry of Tourism and Environment is following up closely the progress with the NAWR and the project.
3. As for the Kalivac HPP, the application for the Environmental Impact Assessment (NEA) has been registered by the National Environment Agency in late 2019. The process being conducted is detailed Impact Assessment Report in compliance with the national legal framework on EIA and environment protection. As NEA has informed the public hearing has taken place on 22.1.2020 in Memaliaj town, according to the procedures set out in the Law “On Environment Impact Assessment”. The EIA report is being processed by NEA.
4. For the Pocem HPP, there are no new developments from the Administrative Court of Appeal. The project did not start implementing, after being suspended by the Administrative Court decision of 2017, and is still awaiting the decision of the Appeal of this Court. The validity of the approved Environmental Declaration ended on 24.04.2017 and the subject has to start procedures from beginning for any environmental permit.
5. The most important development is the identification and announcement from the Minister of Tourism and Environment for the designation of the upper part of Vjosa river as Protected Landscape. This initiative was first articulated by the Minister of Environment, in a meeting in June 2019 in Permet city, where Vjosa river passes through. Meanwhile during the second half of 2019 the National Agency of Protected Areas in cooperation with the NaturAl project prepared the study for the assessment and enlargement of the network of Protected Areas in Albania. This study that was officially launched on the 17th February 2020, with the participation of the Minister of Tourism and Environment, includes Vjosa river Protected Landscape, which consists on the upper part of the river basin. The study is complete and includes GIS boundaries of the proposed area as well as the description of the area and internal zoning required for the designation of a PA, in accordance with the national legal framework. The proposal is presented to local stakeholders with the coordination of the Regional Agency of Protected Areas of Gjirokastra district (in which Permet city is placed) as well a regional presentation and consultation, that took place in Korca, in the context of the proposals discussion at the regional level. After this a national consultation workshop took place in Tirana in December 2019.

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment and NAPA are currently working to prepare the Decision of the Council of Ministers' based on the study, for the proposal of the updated network of protected areas (which includes upper part of Vjosa river) by the end of 2020. This will contribute greatly in the protection of Vjosa river and of biodiversity in the area.

As for the protected landscape Vjose-Narte the update of boundaries for the area in the national study on assessment is to reflect the changes that have taken place over the years, thus impacting the values of the area for which it has been protected. There is absolutely no intention to decrease the area of protected landscape Vjose-Narte, but instead to delist the part that has lost its values for which it has been designated. At the contrary the overall coverage of protected areas in Albania will increase as the result of this new national study to around 28 %.

We remain committed to fully implement the recommendation 202 (2018) and the steps taken so far show the willingness of the Albanian Government on this issue.

We will update the Bern Convention Secretariat once the Vjosa RBMP first phase is completed.