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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

43<sup>rd</sup> meeting

Strasbourg, 27 November - 1 December 2023

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**Open case-file: 2016/5**

**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 of Albania*

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**REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA**  
**MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENT**

Tirana, 20 October 2023

**Subject:** Suspending the construction of Vlora International Airport in accordance with the decision of the Bern Convention

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 explain and state the position of the Government of Albania on this regard.

- EU integration is a top priority for the Albanian Government. Albania is a candidate country to the European Union. As part of the accession process, for more than a decade, Albania is intensively working on transposing the EU Directives to its national legislation.
- Albania is a signatory to various international environmental conventions such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Bern Convention, CITES, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification among others (Table 4). The status of implementation of these agreements varies and some require significantly greater efforts to others for implementing certain measures on the ground.
- Albania has embraced the European Green Deal and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans

Albania is committed to prepare a road map for Green Agenda, identified in Sofia Declaration for Western Balkans, that includes: (1) biodiversity, resources aiming to protect and restore the natural wealth of the region, (2) circular economy, addressing in particular waste, recycling, sustainable production and efficient use of resources, (3) climate action, including decarbonization, energy and mobility, (5) fighting pollution of air, water and soil and (6) sustainable food systems and rural areas.

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE) identifies the fulfillment of Chapter 27 of the accession process to the European Union as important step towards implementing the European Green Deal and the Green Agenda in Albania. For developing a range of policy documents, strategies and other legal acts, assessing the transposition of the legal framework in the field of environment as well as monitoring the progress towards fulfilling Chapter 27, financial, technical and organizational support is needed. Additionally, the MTE asks for guidance and consultation during the negotiation process, enhancing and developing institutional capacity and inter-institutional coordination and interface to ensure proper synergy and efficiency. MTE to achieve its environmental objectives by implementing existing legislation with a number of environment related programs and projects covering environment protection, nature protection and conservation as well as waste and water management that are directly financed by the state budget or supported financially by donors/development partners.

To support the objectives of the European Union Green Deal, Albania signed two Declarations at the Sofia Summit in November 2020: the Western Balkan countries on the Green Agenda, as well as the creation of a Common Regional Market, which aim to make the economy sustainable and climate-neutral by 2050, through a set of comprehensive political and financial initiatives and reforms.

Green growth, for Albanian Government means fostering economic growth and development, while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our well-being relies. To do this, it must catalyze investment and innovation, which will underpin sustained growth and give rise to new economic opportunities for business and Albanian citizens.

Furthermore, Albania is very active regarding the implementation of **ecosystem-based adaptation** and **nature based solutions** in the form of wetland restoration used to protect settlements against floods or coastal erosion, while restoring forest landscapes and restoration measures within potential Natura 2000 sites need to be strongly taken into consideration. The necessity of monitoring schemes is clear but the implementation lags behind due to a lack of capacities, expertise and financial resources.

While the necessity of monitoring is clear, we acknowledge the challenges posed by limited capacities, expertise, and financial resources.

- Protected areas - the network **has been significantly increased** with **almost 21,4% of the surface of our country**, but we acknowledge that matters of management lag behind. We have progressed quite well with the establishment of the legal and institutional framework for monitoring and reporting on biodiversity and forestry. However, implementation still lags behind due to a lack of funds, and there is also a strong need towards the Inventory of Biodiversity at the national level.

It is our pride in relation to the recent decisions of the Government of Albania and MTE with the designation of the Vjosa River, as the last wild river in Europe as National Park (DCM 155, date 13.03.2023); National Park of Albanian Alps by almost doubling the surface; and of Porto Palermo as marine protected area. We are resolute in our commitment to develop the management plans for these areas, and we eagerly aim to meet the 30/30 target of the Biodiversity Global Framework and the European Strategy post-2020 for Biodiversity.

The Vjosa valley is one of the great potential areas for development of sustainable tourism based on environment and cultural values in Albania. In recent years Vjosa has been known on a European and international scale for its unique natural heritage values. Our collaboration and work with Patagonia and the IUCN, together with environmental organizations such as EcoAlbania, and other local NGOs, has played a significant role in emphasizing the multidimensional values of the Vjosa.

The decision to protect once and for all the only wild river in Europe like the Vjosa River and its tributaries as National Park is giving us, a different development perspective to the region and to the local communities along the Vjosa. It is understandable that this brave commitment of the Albanian Government is associated with higher costs because of the categorical prohibition of any business of economic activity that could affect the river body and its tributaries. "This designation is about to change a mindset, but we are fully aware that protecting an area does not mean that you enshrine it in isolation from the economy.

### **Vlora Airport**

During 2019-2021, the Evaluation of the System of Protected Areas has been carried out in Albania associated with an extensive consultation process. The study has examined all the surfaces of protected areas in Albania and analyzed the entire value of biodiversity for each of them. All stakeholders have been met/informed during the evaluation process, led by an independent panel of experts. Additionally, line ministries and state agencies were part of the consultation. Thanks to this process, the total area of protected areas in Albania has increased from 17.5% to 21.4% and will continue to increase to 30% of the area by 2030.

Worth mentioning the designation of the Vjosa River and its three tributaries as National Park, that is considered the last wild river in Europe.

In addition during the study carried out by NAPA, it was found that areas (Vjose – Narte and Pishë Poro) have been approved with the status of Protected Landscape "Vjosë - Nartë" through DCM no. 680, dated 22.10.2004 and the Managed Nature Reserve "Pishë - Poro" with the Regulation of the Ministry of Agriculture no. 1, dated 27.07.1977, but at the moment when these areas were announced, the cadastral and cartographic data were incomplete and incorrect, inaccuracies were observed in the designation of the limiting line (separating border), bringing inaccuracies even to the surface of these areas.

Moreover, the General Local Plan of Vlora Municipality – Territorial Strategy approved through the **Decision of National Territory Council No.1, date 16.10.2017** has identified the former airport of Vlora as abandoned site, part of the infrastructure system expected to be revitalized because at the time the area was used as dumpsite for inert waste.

### **EIA process**

**In response to your request to stop the works at the Akerni Airport in Vlora** in the location where it is being built, as well as to your opinions on the non-compliance of the ESIA study with the requirements of Albanian and European legislation, on the irreparable damage to biodiversity, especially avifauna, due to the construction and operation of this airport in this location, we would like to clarify as following:

- The area of 300 ha of Vlore International Airport - VIA has been used as a military airport for nearly two decades before 1940, and for nearly 30 years as a military aerodrome where powerful fighter jets (MIG 17) operated. As such (airport status), it was by error included in the protected area (2004), a mistake that was corrected by restoring the status as "Airport infrastructure" (2021) by removing it from the "Protected Landscape" area, and for this very reason, it has been seen as the most favorable alternative.
- The existing airfield is also positioned close to existing urban areas (villages) and the current Levan-Vlora highway, surrounded by former agricultural fields. The airport runway and the proposed project development area are far from the protected landscape area and not necessarily on the pelican flight route to the Narta Lagoon. However, a series of protective measures have been listed to be implemented during the construction of the airport and during the operation of the airport, clearly defined in the relevant EIA, and in the Environmental Declaration where we single out the obligation of the Ecological Management Plan, which necessarily includes the components of scientific monitoring.
- VIA's ESIA has been prepared in full compliance with Albanian legislation (<https://turizmi.gov.al> - 2018), which in turn is aligned with the European legislation (<https://environment.ec.europa.eu> - law-and-governance). In 320 pages, 56 original references, 67 maps and 62 tables of data are included in the final ESIA document described in detail:
  - Requirements according to the Albanian and European Legislation as well as the environmental and social performance required by the financial institutions ([IFC's Performance Standards on Environmental and Social. International Finance Corporation https://www.ifc.org](https://www.ifc.org) > [insights-reports > ifc-performanc...](https://www.ifc.org/insights-reports/ifc-performance...))
    - selection of the location of the VIA location and discussion of alternatives<sup>6</sup>;
    - physical & environmental current situation;
    - expected environmental and social impacts and evaluation of magnitude and significance for each group of impacts;
    - avoidance and/or reduction of impacts and respective improvement measures;
    - management and monitoring plans.

The methods used in the evaluation as well as the discussions in the document are in accordance with the best European practices.

- According to the procedures defined in the Law No. 146/2014 "On Public Information and Consultation", a wide, massive and comprehensive consultation was carried out through 16 meetings with the local community (administrative units of Novosele and Vlore), regional and local authorities as well as the institutions responsible for environmental protection where civil society (NGOs first of all) have been participants in all public presentations. In these presentations, all questions and environmental concerns have been answered, and the explanations for the ESIA and the impacts for birds specifically have been given in detail.
- The characterization of biodiversity and birds, in the vicinity of the airport, was carried out based on previous studies on biodiversity and particularly, on birds. As part of the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) study conducted for a one-year period in the Project area (January-December 2021), two observations were made for birds; at the end of April and September, periods which correspond with the time of bird migration. Detailed data of birds (61 dominant species in the area) such as their orientation behavior, direction, main feeding micro zones/habitats used by them, weight and nature of their flight are summarized in the special study "Critical Habitats" Assessment" whose conclusion is "In the Project area, no irreversible damages to the ecological functions of the ecosystem have been identified and are not expected, leading to the damage and sustainability of

biodiversity. Also, in the next special report, The Bird Strike Risk Assessment concludes that: "Despite the presence of migratory and nesting birds in the vicinity of the flight area, Flight Management Plans make it possible to eliminate bird flock strikes both through flyway selection and through the elimination of micro grazing areas of birds crossing the flyway".

- Regarding your concern about the submersion of the I VIA square (annex B, figure 1) the construction project places the runways, the square and its buildings at a height of 2.4 m above the actual level of the field where it is being built or  $3.2 \pm 0.2$  m above sea level. The safety of flights and the reduction of impacts on birds (annex C and D, figures 2 & 3) has been a concern of the evaluation experts. The maps in these annexes show the negative impacts in the case of a direct flyway in the direction of the axis of the takeoff runway. The deviation of the flyway in the northeast direction, as proposed by Albanian civil aviation experts, does not affect the bird migration route in the area of the Vjosa delta. On the other hand, during the ten years of operation of flights at this airport, there have been no collision accidents, and no reduction in the number of birds in the area of the protected landscape has been observed.

So as previously mentioned, the construction of the airport has gone through all the consultation process requested by the Albanian legislation. The developer "Vlora International Airport – VIA" Ltd. has applied all the necessary procedure of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) through the Albanian institutions. During the public consultation meeting held, the community living in the area, including local NGOs, has been very supportive of the construction while the association that addressed concerns has not been part of several public consultations.

In accordance with the existing legal framework and the proposal of the National Environment Agency (NEA), the Minister of Tourism and Environment decided to issue the Environmental Declaration for this project. The approved Environmental Declaration includes a set of conditions to be met by the developer during the airport construction phase, as well as some criteria that must be met during the airport's operating phase, with specific concrete indicators for birds in general and migratory birds particularly. (The declaration recommendations and monitoring plan are attached)

The operator has carried out three self-monitoring in 6-month periods, namely on: June 8, 2022, December 8, 2022, and June 8, 2023. During these self-monitoring, data on the analyzed elements, such as: noise level, liquid emissions, gas level, have been presented and dust in the air.

On the other hand, since during these self-monitoring, elements of the state of biodiversity or habitats were not analyzed, it was considered by the MTE that on site verification and monitoring as a necessary tool.

On 14.09.2023 and 15.09.2023, two site verification were carried out by NEA and NAPA on the impact on the environment from the implementation of the project for the construction of the Vlora International Airport by the entity "Vlora International Airport - VIA" sh.p.k., which is equipped with an Environmental Statement with AN-281120210002, dated 06.12.2021, by the National Environment Agency.

To enhance and rigorously enforce monitoring efforts, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment has taken proactive steps. A dedicated working group with experts from MTE, National Agency of Protected Area and National Environment Agency has been established by Order of the Minister of Tourism and Environment **No. 287, dated 26.09.2023, "On the establishment of the working group for the on-site verification of the impact on the environment from the implementation of the project of the subject "Vlora International Airport - VIA" sh.p.k."**

*Recognizing the Importance of impartiality and thorough oversight, we are considering the possibility of collaborating with independent experts or representatives of civil society organizations to ensure strict compliance with environmental regulations and minimize any adverse effect through the construction and operation of the project.*

### **Position of Civil Aviation Authority**

Due to the fact that the works for the construction of the Vlora Airport are still ongoing, and the objective to start the operations at this Airport is in the spring of 2025, the obligations arising from, monitoring, improvement and EIA implementation in the long-term plan after the airport is certified and put into operation, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has begun interactions with the MTE in regard to addressing of environmental issues. The Civil Aviation Authority is part of the working group established for the purpose, among others, to take measures to mitigate the likely impact of the airport on the environment.

Following and in accordance with the international standards of civil aviation that has been transposed into the national legislation, as well as the best practices applied, CAA will certify and continuously will monitor the activities of the Airport against the impact of the operations to the environment with the sole objective of minimizing these impacts at the lowest level. CAA will put in place all the enforcement mechanisms for the airport operator to fulfill the obligations against the implementation of the EIA.

Through the Airport Wildlife Committee, the Civil Aviation Authority, as being one of the most important stakeholders, will ensure communication, cooperation, and coordination with all other stakeholders, including environmental experts, environmental associations (NGOs, CSOs), local authorities, and state environmental agencies.

The well-established processes and the respective Key Performance Indicators will enable the continuous monitoring of the flora and fauna, updating of the EIA and the review of measures to be improved in a continuous manner. If necessary, the Civil Aviation Authority will engage specialists in the field to help to improve and increase the effectiveness of the Wildlife Management Plan implementation.

### **Tourism development**

In terms of tourism, Vlora Airport is expected to increase tourist activity in the south of Albania. From the point of view of competition in the field of tourism, we remind, that Vlora is located in front of two tourist cities with airports in Italy (Brindisi and Bari), near three airports in Greece (Thessalonica, Ioannina, Corfu), the second airport in North Macedonia located in Ohrid, as well as Montenegro with two airports (Podgorica and Tivari).

Moreover, apart from what is mentioned above in the region, we find cases where airports operate in the vicinity or within protected areas with a high degree of protection. Thus, by analogy, the most illustrative are: Burgas Airport - Bulgaria Which is located 1,000 m away from Lake ATANASKOVSKO (protected area [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286907567\\_THE\\_BIRDS\\_OF\\_LAKE\\_ATANASOVSKO\\_Status\\_and\\_Checklist\\_Second\\_Edition](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286907567_THE_BIRDS_OF_LAKE_ATANASOVSKO_Status_and_Checklist_Second_Edition)) with about 320 bird species ATANASKOVSKO (protected area, with about 320 bird species) as well as, Podgorica Airport, which is located 5 km from Lake Shkodra. Lake Shkodra is one of the richest places with a variety of birds, 270 species.

In both cases, the airports are in conditions comparable to that of Vlora, but in no case have serious vulnerabilities and irreparable impacts and the destruction of biodiversity and bird life been observed.

Tourism is a strategic priority for Albania, for the development of the economy. Very recently, Albania had 8.7 million foreign visitors. Having tourism development as a priority and the increase in the number of elite tourists, as a form of development for sustainable tourism, it is necessary to create infrastructure access such as Vlora Airport for the entire south coast. As mentioned, as a result of this investment, there will be direct impacts from the operation of the airport, indirect impacts from the increase of B2B relations, and induced impact as a result of the increase in personal income caused by the direct and indirect effects and the increase in tourism. It is estimated that Vlora Airport will generate 1,500 jobs during its construction and management, and thousands more indirect jobs during its activities.

We emphasize that during the public consultations, **the residents, as one of the main interest groups, have supported and been in favor of this project to the maximum, valuing the impact it will have on the economic development of the area.**

### **Relation with the Conventions/international obligations**

Albania is a party Republic of Albania has adhered into two Protocols of the Conventions of the Biological Diversity, UNFCCC, UNCCD, CMS and Bern Convention etc., which brings in front of us a double responsibility for compliance both at national and international level. Moreover, MTM periodically reports to the secretariat of the Berne Convention and other related conventions.

### **Monitoring Measures for Vlora Airport Project - Ensuring Environmental Compliance**

**Background:** The Vlora Airport project, situated on the site of a former military airport, is subject to stringent environmental regulations. To ensure compliance and minimize its environmental footprint, a robust monitoring plan has been developed.

#### **Environmental Compliance:**

##### **1. Environmental Declaration (Legal Requirement):**

- Issued by the National Environment Agency (NEA) on 06.12.2021, the Environmental Declaration sets out conditions for the project's construction and operation phases.
- Ensures legal compliance with Albanian environmental legislation.
- Mandates regular reporting and inspections by NEA, the Fier/Vlora Regional Environment Directorate, and the Environmental Inspectorate.

##### **2. Self-Monitoring Reports (Legal Requirement):**

- Conducted by the project developer, Vlora International Airport (VIA).
- Occur biannually, with reports generated on June 8, 2022, December 8, 2022, and June 8, 2023.
- Monitor various environmental aspects, including noise levels, emissions, and air quality, in accordance with Albanian regulations.

#### **Monitoring Measures in Action:**

##### **1. Onsite Monitoring and Verification (Environmental Compliance):**

- Carried out by a specialized working group from the National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA) on September 14-15, 2023. Following a monitoring group is established by a minister's order, which includes representatives from MTE, NEA, and NAPA. The monitoring group purpose varies, such as responsibilities include data analysis, site visits, and reporting.
- Focuses on verifying compliance with the Environmental Declaration and self-monitoring reports.

##### **2. Specific Environmental Monitoring Measures:**

- **Footprint Compliance:** Ensuring construction activities remain within the defined project footprint.
- **Fire Safety Measures:** Verification of the presence of foam canisters to prevent and manage fires.
- **Protection of Water Sources:** Confirmation that there are no water sources near the construction site, aligning with legal requirements.
- **Tree Preservation:** Ensuring no damage to trees within the construction area.

- **Immediate Environmental Intervention:** Verification that the developer promptly addresses any negative environmental impacts.
- **Surface Water Management:** Monitoring the installation of sewerage networks for effective surface water management.

### 3. **Wildlife and Bird Protection (Biodiversity Preservation):**

- **Breeding Area Preservation:** Avoiding construction activities near bird breeding areas during critical periods.
- **Nighttime Work Restrictions:** Imposing restrictions on nighttime work within 600 meters of sensitive areas, coupled with minimal lighting.
- **Bird Deterrence Measures:** Deploying bird-scaring elements to prevent nesting in construction zones.
- **Water Body Protection:** Ensuring no polluted water discharges into natural water bodies.
- **Habitat Connectivity Planning:** Collaborating with specialists to identify locations for constructing underpasses or bridges, preserving habitat connectivity for wildlife.

### 4. **Landscape Rehabilitation (Environmental Restoration):**

- Scheduled for the project's completion, landscape rehabilitation will enhance environmental restoration efforts.

This comprehensive monitoring plan serves as a blueprint for ensuring legal compliance and effective environmental management throughout the Vlora Airport project's lifecycle, prioritizing environmental preservation and biodiversity conservation.

Herewith monitoring plan for the Vlora Airport project, including the schedule and responsible parties:

Monitoring Activity	Frequency	Responsible Party	Start Date	End Date
<b>Environmental Declaration Review</b>	As needed	National Environment Agency (NEA)	Ongoing	Ongoing
<b>Self-Monitoring Reports</b>	Every 6 months	Developer (Vlora International Airport - VIA)	June 8, 2022	Ongoing
			December 8, 2022	Ongoing
			June 8, 2023	Ongoing
<b>Onsite Monitoring and Verification</b>	Monthly	Monitoring Working Group established with Minister order (MTE, NEA, NAPA)	September 2023	Ongoing
<b>- Compliance with Footprint Definition</b>				
<b>- Fire Safety Measures</b>				
<b>- Protection of Water Sources</b>				



<b>- Tree Preservation</b>				
<b>- Environmental Intervention</b>				
<b>- Surface Water Management</b>				
<b>- Wildlife and Bird Protection</b>				
<b>Landscape Rehabilitation</b>	End of construction	Developer (VIA)	Ongoing	Ongoing
<b>Habitat Connectivity Planning</b>	Ongoing	Developer (VIA) and Specialists	Ongoing	Ongoing

This monitoring plan outlines the monitoring activities, their frequency, responsible parties, and the start and end dates for each activity related to the Vlora Airport project's environmental impact. Monitoring is ongoing to ensure compliance and minimize environmental impacts throughout the project's lifecycle.

- February 2023 -

Pursuant to the comments and the position paper of the National Authorities on the OSA Report, as follows the latest updates:

After declaring Vjosa River a “Natural Park”, in 2022, MoTE established a cooperation with “Patagonia” & IUCN experts on protection status of Vjosa river area to a National Park (Category II IUCN). In July 2022, an MoU with Patagonia and IUCN was signed. It has been almost a year that international and national experts have been working regarding designation Vjosa as National Park that includes the Delta of Vjosa. All the work done by far was presented in COP 15 held in Montreal, December 2022, where Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Albania Ms. Kumbaro, with participation of Ministers of Environment the Region (Macedonia, Slovenia), Deputy Minister of Environment and Energy in charge of Environmental Protection, Ministry of Environment and Energy of Greece Mr. Amyras, Director General of IUCN Dr. Oberle, and of CEO of Patagonia Mr. Gellert. During this dedicated ceremony, IUCN certified the work done so far for the declaration of Vjosa National Park and Minister of Tourism and Environment of Albania Ms. Kumbaro together with CEO of Patagonia Mr. Gellert and Deputy Minister of Environment Mr. Amyras, made a commitment by ensuring that the same process will take place in Greece regarding the protection of the AOS River, that originates from the Pindi Mountains, making so the whole river in two countries under the status of a protected area.

After this commitment, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change of the Republic of Greece has established a joint working group for a better collaboration and coordination of the process, aiming to reach out the transboundary protection and environmental management of the river Vjosa/Aoös. In addition, Minister of Tourism and Environment of Albania Ms. Kumbaro had a fruitful meeting in Athens on 31 January with the Minister of Environment and Energy of Greece Mr. Skrekas in the context of the bilateral cooperation for the protection of the Aaos/Vjosa River at a transboundary level.

As a first step, the Joint Working Group with members and experts of both Ministries, will work together on the elaboration of the proposed joint Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). An initial draft has been prepared in view of the meeting of the joint working group that will take place in Albania in the first half of March.

It has to point out that after six months of intensive work by a team of 30 national and international experts, the document "Vjosa Wild River - National Park - Vision and Feasibility Study" was presented to NAPA and NAPA's General Director, Ms. Daniel Pirushi on December 29, 2022 by the National Coordinator, Ms. Adelina Greca, appointed for the cooperation on declaring Vjosa Wild River National Park. The document "Vjosa Wild River - National Park - Vision and Feasibility Study", which was drafted according to international protection standards holding the IUCN signature, is a very comprehensive study, that will serve as the basis for declaring the Vjosa River a National Park.

Following the process, The Ministry of Tourism and Environment, started the legal procedure on Declaring Vjosa a National Park. At this moment the draft decision of the Council of the Ministers, is being circulated to the line Ministries, before going for approval in the Council of Ministers.

Apart from the legal procedure of declaring Vjosa River a National Park, the process in which MoTE and NAPA, are working in collaboration with IUCN experts, is associated with a second phase (II). Phase II of the project will consider extension of the Vjosa Wild River National Park (VWRNP) towards the Lagoon. Integration of both protected areas is already under expert assessment and will be further discussed during 2023 (phase II of VWRNP declaration).

The purpose of the draft decision that we have prepared "On the declaration of the Wild River Vjosa National Park", category II of protected areas, is to preserve the unique hydro-morphological and ecological integrity of this ecosystem according to Category II standards for protected areas, in harmonization with the standards of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) through:

- a) Ensuring the protection of ecosystems, native species, their habitats and natural processes, including all free-flowing tributaries and other important functional hydro-geomorphological and biodiversity areas of the Vjosa River Watershed through effective management existing areas and inclusion of additional areas;
- b) To preserve the ecological connection between the natural areas within the ecosystem of the wild Vjosa River that is intended to be declared a National Park and outside the boundaries of this Park;

- c) Reducing the impacts of infrastructure on natural resources and biodiversity and limiting the fragmentation of habitats;
- d) Reducing the negative impacts of foreign invasive species on natural ecosystems;
- e) Promotion of research and monitoring of the natural and social environment.

Also, the purpose of this draft decision is to offer recreation activities and cultural experiences to connect people with nature and Albanian culture, as well as to promote their sustainable use, both inside and outside the borders of the National Park Wild River Vjosa (PKLEV ), to provide income for local residents and provide space for activities that are compatible and in respect to the main objective of the National Park while aiming the objectives for Sustainable Development and of Sustainable Development Goals as well as of implementation of Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention of Biological Diversity.

Vjosa National Park is planned to be approved in early 2023.

Tirana, 17.2.2023