

## DEVASTATION OF RIVER FLOWS

### THE RIVER CIJEVNA IN PIPES

**Pursuant to the statements of Montenegrin officials, they are not informed by the authorities in Tirana that they have started construction of small hydro power plants in the north of Albania, where slightly less than half of the Cijevna flow is located. This will have devastating consequences on the plant and animal life in this river, and on its banks. In July in Shkodra, senior officials of the two governments committed themselves to act together on the unobstructed flow of transboundary watercourses, with the permanent exchange of information**

This document has been violated although it has not been 100 days since the signing of the *Agreement on International Relations between Montenegro and Albania in the field of cross-border water management*. At the beginning of July in Shkodra, senior officials of the two governments committed themselves, inter alia, to act together on the unobstructed flow of transboundary watercourses, with the permanent exchange of all necessary information.

"These activities concern preserving the quality of water, protection from floods, regulation and maintenance of watercourses, more intensive exchange of information and searching for funds for financing these activities" said on that day the Deputy Prime Minister of Montenegro and Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development **Milutin Simović**. However, according to the formal statements of the Montenegrin officials, they are still not informed by the authorities in Tirana that they have started the construction of small hydro power plants (SHPP) on the Cijevna River (alb.Cem), in the north of Albania, where there is located slightly less than half of the flow of this beautiful river. This will undoubtedly have devastating consequences on the plant and animal life of the Cijevna, as well as the banks of that river.

Last year, the Cijevna River Canyon was proclaimed a natural monument on the Montenegrin side, because it is a habitat for rare and endangered species that are under domestic and international protection.

The Government of Montenegro was informed by local non-governmental organizations dealing with ecology and the media that the construction of hydro power plants have started! After that "competent authorities of the Republic of Albania were officially requested all appropriate information and available documentation concerning the assessment of environmental impacts and the possibility of participation of the Montenegrin public regarding the consideration of the received documents." While waiting for responses, construction of four small hydro power plants is ongoing, and the water of this river, about two kilometers in length, will be pushed into the pipes, tunnels and channels. During the reign of former Prime Minister **Sali Berisha**, the concessions were given to two tycoons, one from Albania, the other from Kosovo), who will build energy facilities which will produce several megawatts of electricity.

This brutal attack on nature has occurred after the construction of the modern road connecting Shkodra with the north end of that country (drastically reducing the distance between

Podgorica and Plav, or Gusinje), and when an increasing number of foreign guests has begun to discover the beauty of this region.

In Albania, 117 small hydro power plants have been built, which produce more than 10 percent of the electricity in that country, 43 are being built, and another 364 are given permits. It is also being built in natural monuments, national parks, and populated areas. No river will practically remain untouched, which often leads to conflicts with the domicile population. There were victims during those conflicts. However, regarding 67 percent of cases, protests are organized only when excavators start to devastate the watercourse.

**The concessions for the construction of four small hydro power plants on the Cijevna River were given to two tycoons, one from Albania, the other from Kosovo, during the reign of former Prime Minister Sali Berisha). This brutal attack on nature has occurred after the construction of the modern road connecting Shkodra with the north end of that country (drastically reducing the distance between Podgorica and Plav, or Gusinje), and when an increasing number of foreign guests has begun to discover the beauty of this region**

The group called "Protect the Rivers" has been functioning since July 2015 in this neighboring country. It has been formed by the most prestigious Albanian ecological organizations. Pointing out this uncontrolled construction, which is contrary to the sustainable development and needs of the country, they have asked for a three-year moratorium on the construction of small hydro power plants on the entire territory of that country.

It is also pointed out that European financial institutions, through commercial banks, have allocated funds for the construction of the one third of these facilities on the pretense that they are renewable energy sources.

"Do not devastate the most precious rivers in Europe. Divert the money to other fields of renewable energy before European wild rivers are irreversibly ruined," stated the representatives of the campaign "Save the Blue Heart of Europe" headquartered in London in a petition with 120,000 signatures, which was submitted to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Albanian analysts note that the government in Tirana sees the expansion of small hydro power plants as compensation for smaller investments in construction. The reason is that the electricity market is guaranteed, as well as the price, which is significantly higher than the market one. Costs are only reflected in the construction of facilities and their maintenance. Concessions, as a rule, are issued for a period of 30 years.

"Nowadays we have small hydro power plants in our region because this is one of the safest ways to make money. Of course, if you are not ashamed of anything, you do not care whether you will devastate all the rivers or not. You take a loan and build it and then repay it after seven to ten years. Then, in 20 years, when it rains, you have got the money," says the head of the World Wildlife Fund's Regional Office (WWF Adria) in Zagreb, **Deni Porej**.

*A study for the protection of the Cijevna River*, by the Bird Protection and Study Center (CZIP) states that this river enters the "Green Europe" system, while the canyon is identified as the Emerald habitat of the Bern Convention, an area near the Lake Skadar National Park, which

protection was solemnly committed by both governments pursuant to the aforementioned agreement.

Albanian Minister of Energy and Industry **Damian Gjiknuri** says that only two "big dams" are being built in Albania. "Most of the others are small dams without reservoirs that depend on seasonal water inflow. Such hydro power plants produce less than 10 MW of energy and therefore they do not need environmental impact assessments", he considers.

*Green Home* Executive Director **Nataša Kovačević** points out that Montenegro and Albania are signatories to the ESPOO Convention on Transboundary Environmental Impacts. "Regarding this matter, it is obvious that there has been a violation of this Convention, where Albania did not announce which procedures would be performed in that field, or which negative effects would be produced by them. They did not draft an impact assessment report, nor did they have a period for public discussion. Actually, cross-border consultations in Montenegro should have been organized in that period", claims Kovačević adding that civil society organizations will not give up the rescue of the Cijevna River, and they will try to appeal to the relevant international entities.

"A group in Albania from the affected area of the municipality of Keljmen is to be formed, which, along with non-governmental organizations from Montenegro, in the upcoming period, will deal with cross-border impacts of small hydro power plants from various aspects. We are going to stop all the next works" says Kovačević.

The construction of large hydro power plants during the 1960s and 1970s on the Drim River, which is the main tributary of the Bojana River, is the reason that erosion of beaches on Ulcinj Riviera has been happening for decades. Sediments, or deposits, that appeared in the zone of the mouth of the Bojana under the influence of sea currents, settled along the coast, forming a wonderful beach. But this balance has been disturbed and the beach on the island of Ada has been reduced for 85 meters for 35 years. The erosion process has also affected the Long Beach.

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