

IRL reveals for the first time how powerful private interests have endangered one of North Macedonia's most valuable natural treasures — National Park Mavrovo, home to 1400 different plants and animals, including the rare Balkan lynx. More than a decade ago, the national government gave permission to private companies to build three **small hydropower plants** in the park, a move that effectively blocked pending legislation that, if approved, would have protected the park's unique habitats. The investor for two out of the three planned plants, which were to be privately owned but still have not been built, was a top government official: energy entrepreneur and former deputy prime minister for economics, **Kocho Angjushev, who served in the administration of Zoran Zaev of the Social Democratic Union party (SDSM).** Repeated efforts by IRL journalists to get detailed responses to questions from hydropower investors were unsuccessful.

With the national economy pummeled in 2008 by the global financial crisis, the treasured National Park Mavrovo, one of the oldest national parks in Europe, was at risk. The national government had not been in a strong position to take all the needed steps to ensure the park's preservation. But the Italian government decided to lend a helping hand. It provided five million euro to help North Macedonia protect the park, whose biodiversity is exceptional. Both countries signed an agreement in 2008 titled "Environmental Protection, Economic Development and the Promotion of Sustainable Eco-Tourism in the National Park Mavrovo." One of the most important pieces of this project was a valorization study – a scientific assessment of the park's terrain, spearheaded by the Italian branch of an international non-profit organization called UCODEP, later Oxfam Italia. The goal of a terrain analysis is to draw distinct zones within the protected area to ensure proper management.

The master plan that served as the foundation for the valorization study dates back to 1986. In the 2008 agreement with Italy, the VMRO-DPMNE and DUI government decided to go ahead with the valorization project. It was needed before there could be any changes in law to further protect the park.

Makedonka Stojanovska, a professor from the Cyril and Methodius University Faculty of Forestry from Skopje, was appointed project coordinator. She holds a master's degree from the same university where she now teaches numerous courses to both undergraduate and graduate students, most notably a class called "Managing Protected Areas." Stojanovska has dedicated her entire professional life to forest management.

A team of 34 domestic and international experts were hired to work with Stojanovska for the field research. Their task was to make detailed records of the diverse wildlife inhabiting the

park, and its lush vegetation, rivers, and lakes. They counted every tree and animal, noting also that there were people in communities still living in the park. Several public hearings were held to acquaint the general public with the scientists' findings. In 2012, their research culminated in a 400-page study. And a few months later, in January 2013, the study was officially certified by the management organization for National Park Mavrovo as an official accounting of the park's treasures.

IRL's journalists recently met Stojanovska in her office at the Faculty of Forestry.

"I was selected as the scientific coordinator for the project, of course, in accordance with all relevant administrative procedures. I was there from the beginning until the end in 2012 when the finished product was handed over to the Ministry of the Environment and Physical Planning," she said during the May 24, 2022 meeting.

The study outlines three distinct zones of protection within the national park: green, yellow, and red. The green zone (40,490 hectares) — the sustainable use zone — surrounds all urban communities like villages and supporting infrastructure such as roads and power lines. Although these types of developments are allowed in the green zone, they must not harm the surrounding environment. The yellow zone (23,506 hectares) — the actively monitored zone — mandates further nurturing and management so that in the future it can be absorbed by the strictly protected red zone. Finally, the red zone (8,419 hectares) — the strictly protected zone — only allows scientific research. It is the highest form of protection. The drawing of these zones would later prove to be a challenge to the government's efforts to allow development in the park.

Around the same time the valorization study was wrapping up, the national government coalition of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI was preparing to launch a completely different project that would allow the construction of 400 small hydropower plants across the country. Kocho Angjushev, a businessman with substantial energy interests, appeared at a press conference on March 19, 2012, with then-Minister of Economy Valon Saracini to promote the project. Years later, this plan would directly conflict with the valorization study's goals to protect National Park Mavrovo. Parliament had never acted to turn the study's findings into law, leaving the park vulnerable to many types of development.

"All small hydropower plants, including those for which contracts are being signed today, would replace a large hydropower plant such as Spilje, Globocica or Tikves, both in terms of production and investment," Angjushev said at the 2012 press conference.

Former PM Nikola Gruevski planned 400 small hydropower plants

At the beginning of 2013, the valorization study for the National Park Mavrovo project was completed and certified, and handed over to the national government. Five months later,

then-Deputy Prime Minister Zoran Stavrevski signed off on the legislation that was supposed to kick-start the process for Parliament to reaffirm the national park as a protected area. But there, the trail gets cold. Parliament did not take up the measure, instead letting it languish.

That same year, Angjushev, the energy entrepreneur, became the president of the Macedonian Energy Association and the Association of Renewable Energy Producers at the Chamber of Commerce. This put him in a key position to build and strengthen connections. And most importantly, it gave Angjushev opportunities to promote his own energy investments in hydropower and other renewables.

Then-Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski announced plans to go ahead with a multi-phase project that would allow construction of 400 small hydropower plants across North Macedonia.

“Although they are small, given how many there are, together they will significantly support the energy sector and will provide greater stability for the energy system of the Republic of Macedonia,” Gruevski said at a 2013 press conference..

In January 2014, the national government announced a call for bids for proposals to build 80 small hydropower plants that would operate for 20 years.

Among them are three plants situated in the strictly protected red zone on the National Park Mavrovo that was proposed in the 2013 study: two on the Zirovnica River (map reference numbers five and six), and one on the Ribnicka River, (map reference number seven).

A few months later, In March 2014, local businessman Predrag Chemerikic founded Hidrogen Group, according to the Cadaster, the government’s central property registry. In August 2014 he joined forces with Kocho Angjushev’s energy company “Fero Invest,” founded in 2003 to form the consortium Hidrogen Energy Group. The consortium was then chosen from an unknown number of bidders to construct and manage both small hydropower plants planned to be built on the Zirovnica River inside the park.

Aktuel Energy Group, composed of two energy companies — JS Aktuel Gjoko and JES Global — was selected for the plant planned for the Ribnicka river. Its head was Sasho Mitevski, an unknown player in the energy sector. Aktuel Energy Group did not respond to requests for comment from IRL

In the meantime, attempts to reaffirm the national park as a protected area stalled. There is no record that the draft legislation and the valorization study that served as its foundation were ever sent by the Gruevski government to Parliament.

Who ordered the redrawing of the zones?

In 2015, the government of the coalition of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI signed agreements with

these investors for the construction of three small hydropower plants in the park. Around the same time, a valorization study different to the one completed in 2012 emerged. This new study is almost identical to the original one, but there is a crucial difference: the map showing the different zones of protection had been redrawn. In this new version, whose author has not been revealed, the three proposed plants are no longer within the borders of the strictly protected red zone, but fall into the less protected yellow zone – and thus could be built.

The team of experts who had worked on the study were never notified of the redesign of the zones, according to project coordinator Stojanovska. Stojanovska said she found out about the zoning changes in 2019, after a colleague had mentioned the “new” study. Stojanovska had hoped that the colleague was referring to a completely new study which involved additional research since so many years had passed since the one she worked on. She was mistaken.

“Firstly, I addressed the body in charge of managing the park — [formal name is “National Park Mavrovo”] — to ask if they know about this new study and whether my name is mentioned in it. They referred me to the Ministry for Environment and Physical Planning. Together, a representative from “National Park Mavrovo” and I went to the ministry and we saw the two seemingly identical studies except that one said 2012 and the other 2015. The most significant change was the zoning map. The strictly protected red zone looked different,” Stojanovska said.

Although no one consulted her about the changes to the zoning, the changed version also became known in government and at the park as the “2015 Study,” Stojanovska’s name is still on the study, listed as coordinator, the same as she was listed in the original study. But she never approved putting her name on a study that she had not authored.

Slider Content: The left side of the slider shows the boundaries and zoning provided in the 2012 study, while the right side shows the revised 2015 study in which the proposed hydro plants are no longer in a strictly protected zone. Strictly protected zones are colored red.

“I haven’t made any changes, I don’t remember”

To try to determine how the new study came about, which would allow the proposed hydropower plants in what the earlier study had, IRL met y with biologist Svetozar Petkovski, a former employee at the Natural History Museum in Skopje.

During IRL’s first meeting, on May 26, 2022, Petkovski said he worked on the original study and was unaware of the new study or any changes to the original. Petkovski also said that he was hired by the Italian branch of Oxfam and had no contact with any government agencies in North Macedonia. Yet, IRL’s journalists uncovered invoices with documentation

that showed several payments of 34,000 denars made to Petkovski from “National Park Mavrovo” for work from July through October 2016.

During IRL’s second meeting with Petkovski on June 20, 2022, Petkovski acknowledged that he was paid, and said the payments made by the management of the park were for his consulting work on two older hydropower plants, Boshkov Most and Lukovo Pole, which aren’t the subject of this investigation. IRL’s journalists then asked why his name appears as a consultant in the contested 2015 study.

“I haven’t made any changes, but maybe I was consulted. I can’t remember. It’s important to note that neither of those studies have been formally implemented, so...” he said in an interview with IRL.

IRL’s journalists also have found several documents and several different zoning maps. All of the maps created after 2012 have one thing in common: a smaller strictly protected red zone in the areas where powerful investors were supposed to build small hydropower plants. The Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning appears to endorse the newer, less restrictive study from 2015, as the “most acceptable” version, as it is this version shown on the ministry’s website and information boards across the national park.

In 2015, alongside changes to the zoning, a law was drafted by Gruevski’s administration in preparation of the reaffirmation of the national park as a protected area despite the fact that the documentation needed – valorization study – for this law were never officially adopted by the government or the park’s management.

IRL’s journalists reached out to Fero Invest and to Kocho Angjushev, who formed the company with Predrag Chemerikic, who manages and co-owns Hidrogen Group, IRL asked whether they were aware that the a law based on the original 2012 study, had it been approved by Parliament, would jeopardize the concession agreement for the construction of the two plants on the Zirovnica river. In their response by email, they said that Angjushev was only a minority partner with 2% ownership in Hidrogen Energy Group. Since neither plant has yet been built, they questioned the need for IRL’s investigation.

“As for the changes that occurred in 2015, the company FERRO INVEST DOO Skopje was neither informed that the small hydropower plants in question fell within the strictly protected zone nor what led to the changes. The majority owner was only obliged to inform us before the project started given that our company was only supposed to take part in the technical aspect of the project, which never happened anyway. We would like to clarify that the small hydropower plants you’re referring to were never built so that makes the whole discussion on this topic pointless,” said an email to IRL from Fero Invest.

Alarm bells sounding

In 2015, environmental activists from the non-profit organization “Front 21/42” alerted the Secretariat of the Bern Convention at the Council of Europe about Gruevski’s government’s intention to build these small hydropower plants within the borders of the National Park Mavrovo. They sent an urgent request to the Council of Europe, asking for the immediate suspension of any plans for construction of the small hydropower plants in the park, as well as two large plants sponsored by the government, Boshkov Most and Lukovo Pole that were also planned for the park, but have not been built.

Several institutions commented in 2015 on the proposed law that would reaffirm the park as a protected area, but did not include an approved valorization study. The Legislative Secretariat, which provides research and other support to Parliament requested the law be in accordance with the already existing North Macedonian Law on Nature, as it pertains to an environmentally protected area.

The Municipality of Mavrovo and Rostushe, on the other hand, noted in comments about the draft law that alongside the diverse flora and fauna in the park there already are 38 settlements with about 8,500 residents in the park. And park officials themselves said they had no objections to the new draft law.

The environmental non-government organization, “Front 21/24,” which had alerted authorities to the risks of the hydropower projects, said the draft law would transform parts of the strictly protected red zone into a zone with the least protection. As a result of the group’s complaint, the Bern Convention in 2015 opened an investigation, urging the North Macedonian government to cancel any construction plans within the national park. The investigation is still open, almost seven years later.

Since December 2021, the Bern Convention has stated on its website that its recommendation to halt construction also encompasses all illegally constructed buildings within the national park, a byproduct of the rapid urbanization of the area.

“Based on our direct experience with various institutions and given the history of events, our assumption is that they’re avoiding adopting the draft law since it would prevent the construction of the small hydropower plant, already illegally constructed buildings, and those planned for construction,” a representative from “Front 21/42” said in an email statement to IRL.

On March 29, 2016, the Gruevski government instructed the management group for the park to submit documentation confirming the park’s zoning to the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning. The management organization acted as if this meant a completely new zoning of the park so as to allow for the construction of the disputed small hydropower plants.

“During the eighteenth session [of the Gruevski government administration] held on March 29, 2016, the government requested that {park’s managers] and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning make certain allowances in order to build the small hydropower plants for which the government had already signed agreements with two investors for Ribnicka 7 and Zirovnica 5 and 6,” said a letter from the management group for the park, in a letter to to the Minister of Environment, Naser Nuredini on February 3, 2022.

Even so, the draft law to allow the hydropower plants was withdrawn by the Gruevski government.

Kocho Angjushev, Hydropower Investor becomes Deputy Prime Minister

In June 2017, businessman Kocho Angjushev was appointed as Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs as part of Zoran Zaev’s new government. Many news reports portrayed Angjushev as a proven thinker and businessman who would take good care of the country’s economy.

Kocho Angjushev is one of the richest people in North Macedonia, according to Forbes magazine. He owns several companies within the energy sector. Once he entered office, he said he gave up his monthly salary of 81,000 denars and instead donated it for humanitarian purposes and for student scholarships. After only 20 days after his appointment, he stepped down from all of his companies, the government registry of companies shows.

“What is a man with such capital to do?” My capital is in Macedonia. I don’t have extra capital and an extra country. My capital would only be able to develop in a developed and normal country. That is part of my motivation to accept this position,” Angjushev said in an interview with MKD.MK a month after his appointment as deputy prime minister.

The first hint of a conflict of interest between Angjushev’s official capacity as deputy prime minister and his businesses came about only three months after he assumed office, even though he said he had relinquished management but retained ownership in his companies. The company Fero Invest, still owned by the former deputy prime minister, participated and was ultimately chosen during a public and competitive bid for a project run by the state-owned ESM (Power Plants of Northern Macedonia).

“Nowhere in the Law on Preventing Corruption is it stated that I should stop being the owner of the companies. This means that no one should be the Deputy Prime Minister because everyone owns something. I don’t actively manage the companies and as Deputy Prime Minister I don’t want to have any benefit from my position in this Government”, Angjushev said at the time.

A simple error

On November 28, 2017, a few months after a new government headed by Zoran Zaev was elected, the government instructed Angjushev's ministry to monitor the ongoing case of the Bern Convention, their remarks on the small hydropower plant project, and the status of the National Park Mavrovo.

Only three days later, on December 1, 2017 Zaev's Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning sent a letter to National Park Mavrovo citing the previous VMRO-DPMNE-led government's decision to reaffirm the park as a protected area, and requested that the park officials organize a public debate. The Ministry also recommended that the National Park Mavrovo "rely on the newer and modified 2015 Study rather than the original, more protective study.

On December 5, 2017 a new government ministry session took place. According to the official minutes published on their website, the session is chaired by then-Minister Oliver Spasovski. First on the list of attendees, is then Deputy Prime Minister Kocho Angjushev. There is no record that Angjushev excused himself from the discussion, which the Law on the Prevention of Conflict of Interest would require. He declined to speak with IRL.

On the agenda were the concession agreements for the small hydropower plants. The Zaev government then made the decision to extend the concession agreements through annex agreements for the two plants co-owned by Angjushev.

Thinking that this constituted a conflict of interest, the environmental group "Front 21/42" submitted a complaint to the government's Anti-corruption Commission. As a result, the commission opened an investigation in July 2017 into Angjusev and his connections to the energy sector.

The government submitted shorthand notes as proof that Angjushev didn't participate in the discussion. But he is included in the minutes as being present. His inclusion in the minutes is attributed by the Zaev government as a mistake of the support staff.

The Anti-corruption Commission in November 2017 closed the case, concluding that there wasn't any conflict of interest.

Pressure from the top

With the arrival of Zaev's government in 2017, National Park Mavrovo's management had changed as well. Mavrovo resident and SDSM member Samir Ajdini, a member of Zaev's political party, was appointed director of National Park Mavrovo. His work would be essential for the reaffirmation of the park as a protected area. Pressure from the Zaev government to start the process was on the rise through letters from the Ministry of Environment and others..

In July 2018, the management agency for the park submitted a letter to the Ministry of

Environment and Physical Planning in support of the government's projects for the construction of small hydropower plants.

[The management agency] has decided to give their consent for this project considering that all relevant aspects of the construction, according to the old and new zoning, fall within a zone where such construction is permitted without endangering the environment," the letter said.

Immediately afterwards, the Municipality of Mavrovo and Rostuse consented to the construction of the plants and submitted its approval to the then Minister for the Environment, Sadula Duraku.

At the beginning of 2019, Zaev's administration sent a letter instructing the management agency for the park to urgently submit draft legislation to reaffirm the design of the park, but did not specify which boundaries, no later than May 15, 2019.

Some of the members of the park's Management Board, however, were against the construction of plants, believing that they would jeopardize the preservation of the park. Together with director Samir Ajdini, they wrote a letter to then Prime Minister Zaev urging him to put a stop to the project.

"Such concerns are more than alarming and such developments would ultimately damage the country's reputation among the international community," the letter to Zaev said.

In the meantime, the investor of two of the projects — Hidrogen Energy Group — sent a note to the Municipality of Mavrovo and Rostuse that construction of one of the plants on the river Zirovnica was beginning.

On March 4, 2019, there was a meeting in the village of Zirovnica that included the president and the secretary of the local community association, Adnan Saliu and Anes Ahmeti. A representative from Hidrogen Energy Group, the investor of the two planned plants on the nearby river. Meri Mladenovska was also in attendance. She is the former Minister of Justice in the Zaev administration, and a member of the SDSM party. She also was the lawyer for Kocho Angjushev's Fero Invest. She has also represented him in separate personal cases.

According to notes taken during the meeting by local community association secretary Anes Ahmeti, local residents opposed the construction of the plants as they believed they would harm the surrounding environment and destroy its biodiversity. Ahmeti also spoke against the plants' geodetic report as he believed they were insufficient and missed some key points.

"We consider the reports insufficient, written without the support of real field information. Parts of them are even written in Serbian," Ahmeti said.

Ahmeti also pointed out that parts of the annex agreements signed by Hidrogen Energy Group and the government on January 12, 2018 which extended the deadline of the original concession agreements, had also been changed. The coordinates of the dam were different from the original ones.

Company representative Mladenovska, however, claimed that there would be no negative environmental impact. But there is no information about the evidence she used to make her claims.

"[Mladenovska] pointed out that she has all necessary documentation, as well as the fact that a large amount of money had already been paid to settle any property issues and utility bills," the notes of the meeting read.

Municipality of Mavrovo and Rostushe Mayor Medat Kurtovski also attended the meeting. He stood in support of the local community and called for a reexamination of the terrain, noting that it should remain untouched if it fell within the strictly protected zone of the park.

A meeting in Mavrovo

On September 6, 2019, JU National Park Mavrovo held a session of the Management Board. On the agenda was a discussion of the progress of the activities for the re-proclamation of NP Mavrovo as a protected area. All five members of the management board were present at the meeting, records show: . Cane Petreski, Zafket Veali, Vafit Velia, the director of the National Park Samir Aydini and the president of the Management Board Smiljka Teneva.

"The meeting was held at the request of Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Kocho Angjushev," the minutes from the meeting said.

Special advisor to Angjushev, Viktor Andonov, and Prime Minister Zaev's Advisor Olimpija Hristova Zaevska were also present at the meeting.

"The guest, Viktor Andonov, noted that the next steps of the reaffirmation process need to be determined during the board meeting," read the minutes from the meeting.

The board members were unanimous – the reaffirmation process needed to be carried out based on the original valorization study from 2012, the study that would offer more protection to the park.

In the email response, speaking for Angjushev, Fero Invest said there were around 20 employees of the government, monitoring and coordinating the project and others like it, including the work of all state economic institutions, state-owned joint stock companies, public enterprises and other economic entities.

"Cabinet officials attended meetings and were part of committees on a variety of issues, in

order for the government to coordinate economic flows and projects. All the tasks assigned by the government to the cabinet were adequately and professionally fulfilled by the staff," read the email response from "Fero Invest."

After the meeting, there were some significant changes to the detriment of investors at Hidrogen Energy Group. Mavrovo and Rostuse Mayor Medat Kurtovski annulled the building permit for the two hydropower plants planned for the Zirovnica River. Investors, according to the national Construction Law, have two years to begin construction after receiving a building permit from the municipality. Because Hidrogen Energy Group still had not begun building the plants, their permits were automatically invalidated.

In November 2019, the national Anti-Corruption Commission launched another investigation into Angjushev for a conflict of interest in the government's decision to abolish customs tax on lithium-ion batteries, a decision his company "Brako" had directly benefited from, as it is the only one in the nation that produces lithium-ion batteries.. News reports at the time said Zaev's government determined that the investigation was unfounded and that there was no violation of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest.

That same month, however, Angjushev announced his resignation as deputy prime minister, when it became clear that there would be new elections and that Zaev's government had lost its support..

"I have an obligation to retain my position in this government as long as there is a mandate. A government that does not have a mandate I don't need to be present for," Angjushev said at the time.

In January 2020, Angjushev officially resigned and returned to manage Fero Invest and Brako. He had never had to give up his financial interests while serving in government.

Angjushev is giving up on the hydropower plants in Mavrovo

With the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the North Macedonian government was focused on public health and economic measures that would alleviate the fallout. Five months later, in July 2020, the government dissolved and held new parliamentary elections. The SDSM-led coalition secured yet another victory. Angjushev, however, didn't return to politics.

Naser Nuredini was appointed by Zaev as the new Minister of Environment and Physical Planning. The reaffirmation of the National Park Mavrovo as a protected area wasn't a priority for the new government.

In March 2021 Nuredini asked the park's management agency to submit a new valorization study that outlines zones for the park.

"The valorization studies from 2012 and 2015 are older documents, which don't include the

current terrain analysis of the park as outlined in the Law on Natural Protection,” read an email response from the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning.

Nuredini said in an interview with IRL that the government is doing everything it can to secure the necessary funding from international donors to revise the valorization study and continue the reaffirmation process of the park as a protected area.

“Based on an estimate by an international expert, the total amount for the revision of the 2012 valorization study is around 121,000 euros,” the environment ministry said in an email.

Recently, the Ministry received an official letter from the concessionaires of the unbuilt hydropower plants in Mavrovo. Hydrogen Energy Group, where Angjushev is a co-investor, seeking to abandon the project altogether. But there is a potential catch. The companies are seeking repayment from the government for expenses they have incurred.

A Ministry spokesman Angelina Jovanovic said in an email that so far only one company, Hydrogen Energy for Zirovnica 5 and 6 has made a request for compensation for costs incurred, which the Ministry estimated would total MKD 28,575,500.00 (465.000 euros). There has been no request so far for penalties or damages. Hydrogen Energy is owned by Koco Angjushev and Predrag Cernerikic.

Angjushev rejected any suggestion that as deputy prime minister influenced the decisions regarding the small hydropower plant project in Mavrovo, and rebuked IRL’s journalists for raising questions. He unsuccessfully sued IRL in 2021 for linking him to a dirty oil scheme used for heating in North Macedonia. His case is on appeal.

“We consider the insinuation that Mr. Kocho Angjushev was involved in such a scheme unprofessional. That project has been going on for more than a decade and has not been completed even two years after he left government. In 2015, Mr. Kocho Angjushev was neither a member of the Government, nor did he know, nor could he have known that in 2017 he would be part of the government. It’s unclear why you are addressing questions about procedures and decisions made in that period to Mr. Angjushev, Fero Invest replied by email to IRL’s questions.

Is there an end in sight?

Professor Makedonka Stojanovska, who was the project coordinator for the valorization study of 2012, is worried that the key documents and laws for the protection of the park won’t be adopted this year either.

“I wonder, will we be able to overcome the obstacles or will we lose this area with the most beautiful natural landscapes in our country? Why is this happening, is there any additional context, is there anyone holding back this process, I really do not know. Maybe other

institutions or parties hold the answers,” Stojanovska said.

Environmental organization representatives “Front 21/42 said in interviews that political and institutional will is crucial. Based on their direct experience with various institutions, they believe that certain parties are avoiding passing the law to reaffirm Mavrovo as a protected area so that the small hydropower plants can be built alongside other illegally constructed buildings.

“We believe that what affects the political will is corruption, which is deeply ingrained in the field of environmental protection in all relevant institutions, due to which, private interests are placed above the public interest. This in turn results in years of stalling that leaves room for various dubious activities, ” representatives from “Front 21/24” said.

The case opened by the Bern Convention which recommended that the government cancel all plans to build hydropower plants in the national park is still ongoing. As of December 2021, they also included all illegally constructed buildings within the park as part of their recommendation.

IRL sent questions on August 8 to the investors of the planned three hydropower plants in [Mavrovo National Park](#), but they declined to comment on the current status. IRL asked them whether they will terminate the concessions for small hydropower plants, how much money they demand as compensation and whether they were informed before receiving the concessions that the sites are located in the protected zone of the National Park. Koco Angjushev’s partner in Hidrogen Energy Group, Predrag Chemerikic, first said he would answer the questions, but then declined to speak with IRL. The Investors from Actuel Energy Group did not respond to phone messages or questions that IRL sent by email.

Source: IRL