

**Sunčica Kovačević and Sara Tuševljak**, two law students from [Bosnia & Herzegovina](#), are being sued by the Belgian-based company Green Invest for fighting against the construction of a toxic [hydropower plant](#) and defending the **Kasindolska river**, East Sarajevo. Members of the Friends of the Earth network, gathered in Banja Luka for a five-day meeting on biodiversity protection, took a field trip to the river to express their solidarity with the two young activists.

The network meeting organised by Centar za životnu sredinu/Friends of the Earth Bosnia & Herzegovina and Friends of the Earth Europe, was partly devoted to the hydroelectric power plants issue and their harmful impact on rivers and water. Sunčica Kovačević and Sara Tuševljak, who are part of the citizens' initiative "**Stop the construction of small hydroelectric power plants on Kasindolska Rijeka**" and the Coalition for the Protection of the Rivers of B&H, spoke to the participants. Sunčica and Sara are exposed to pressure and so-called SLAPP lawsuits from investors due to their fight against the construction of a small hydroelectric power plant.

**SLAPP** lawsuits (strategic lawsuits against public participation), dangerously more and more commonly used, seek to intimidate activists and demonstrate financial power. Organisations such as Amnesty International have documented this phenomenon, also supporting the two activists.

### **Destructive hydro-energy projects across Southeast Europe**

For several years now, environmental activists have been denouncing the growing number of **illegal hydroelectric projects** in Europe and across the world. In addition to international development banks, numerous companies support the implementation of these infrastructures, many of which are located in protected areas.

This trend continued even during the Covid-19 crisis. As we reported in 2020, energy companies took advantage of the curfews to accelerate the construction of damaging hydroelectric power plants without construction or environmental permits. Many projects are in preparation, even within protected areas like national parks and Natura 2000 sites. Hydropower in Bosnia & Herzegovina is a hugely destructive issue - the region is home to some of the **last wild river systems** in Europe, with people and nature in rural areas dependent on them. Damming rivers for hydropower cuts off communities' access to water for sanitation, drinking and leisure, and rips riverbed and forest ecosystems apart.

### **Young environmental activists face baseless defamation charges**

Sara Tuševljak and Sunčica Kovačević have repeatedly denounced the [environmental impact](#) of infrastructure projects around the Kasindolska River. Through media appearances and

mobilisations, they have shown concern about deforestation and soil erosion in this protected area.

These hydropower projects are implemented by the Bosnian company **BUK**, owned by the Belgian-based company Green Invest. In 2022, BUK filed three defamation suits against the two activists, threatening further legal action if they continued to speak out against the project. The Biodiversity Campaigner & Hydro meeting was an opportunity for the gathered activists to support Sara and Sunčica.

Source: Friend of the Earth Europe