

Authorities in Republika Srpska have denied that investors are using a lack of oversight, owing to the situation with coronavirus pandemic, to illegally build small plants on some of the country's unspoiled but increasingly endangered watercourses. This was said in a response to a statement from the Coalition for the Protection of Rivers in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Save the Blue Heart of Europe campaign.

The lower house of parliament of Bosnia's Federation entity has banned the further construction of small hydro-power plants, which have mushroomed on the country's pristine mountain rivers and streams in recent years to the horror of environmentalists.

The House of Representatives also gave the Federation government three months to analyse related legislation and propose changes to protect the environment - and review all already built plants or those approved for construction.

The environmental non-government organisation Eko Akcija praised the move as "a historic moment for the protection of rivers and environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina,".

But it also warned that the same parliament had told the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to take action on air pollution, and nothing had been done in the meantime.

"Caution is merited also because this is an election year. Both ruling and opposition parties fear for their positions in municipalities, which have rebelled against the violence being done to rivers, aware that many of their councillors and other officials played a role in the destruction of this most precious treasure," Eko Akcija said on its Facebook page.

Bosnia is awaiting local elections on November 15.

The construction of small power plants has intensified across the Balkans in the last few years, and environmental activists say they often involve non-transparent procedures and investors with close ties to the authorities.

The Eko Akcija website says 108 small plants have been built in Bosnia — 65 in the Federation entity and 43 in the mainly Serbian entity, Republika Srpska. It says another 338 are either being built or are planned - 185 and 153 respectively.

Several communities in both the Federation and the Republika Srpska have managed to stop the construction of small hydropower plants with protests and blockades.

"The main role in this story does not belong to the authorities. The ban would have never happened unless the river guardians throughout Bosnia ... had protected them with their bodies, exposing themselves to thugs, police, threats and bad weather. They are the true saviours of our rivers," Eko Akcija said.

It also noted signs of change in the Republika Srpska, where some municipalities have started distancing themselves from small hydro-power projects.

In late April, the municipality of Pale, near Sarajevo, said it will rescind a concession given

## Bosnia's Federation Entity banned further construction of SHPPs

by the previous local administration for the construction of a small plant on the river Prača, following a protest by residents.

Source: [balkaninsight.com](http://balkaninsight.com)