

The project for the construction of hydro power plants in the upper Drina basin dates back to 1972. Even then, no agreement was reached between the former Yugoslav republics, and today this project threatens to disrupt relations between Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro. Legally speaking, the entity ministries have jurisdiction, but despite that, the whole case will end up in the Constitutional Court. Environmental associations in BiH and Montenegro are seeking the annulment of the contract. The project envisions the construction of three hydropower plants in the upper Drina river basin, Buk Bijela, Foca and Paunci, with an estimated value of 450m euros. The deadline for construction is six years, and the entry of Serbia as the majority owner was characterized as the entry of Serbia through the back door into the electricity sector of Republika Srpska (RS). The Prime Minister of this entity, Radovan Viskovic, does not see anything controversial in that.

Serbia was supposed to pay the founding contribution of 20 million euros, but so far it has paid only five million. The editor of the business portal Capital from Banja Luka, Sinisa Vukelic, says that it is incredible that the government found a loophole in the law in order to avoid the public procurement system, leaving 51% of the ownership in the new company to Serbia. The electricity sector is under the jurisdiction of the entities, but this is an open issue of interstate cooperation. For the first man of the SDA, Bakir Izetbegovic, it is clear, however, that this is an issue for which the state has exclusive competence and that the Constitutional Court will decide on everything. It is certain that the Constitutional Court will rule on this issue, given that state parliamentarians from non-Serb parties have submitted a request to the Constitutional Court to resolve the dispute with RS regarding the construction of the Gornja Drina system. While the state is suing the entity, Serb member of the BiH presidency Milorad Dodik says RS has jurisdiction in this case.

The HES Gornja Drina project does not refer only to BiH and Serbia, but in this case also to Montenegro, which was not consulted in the preparation of the environmental impact study. That is why non-governmental organizations have filed a complaint to the UN Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment, including "Green Home" from Montenegro. The executive director of this non-governmental organization, Natasa Kovacevic, says that signing any document is unacceptable, considering the ongoing procedure.

### **Environmentalists opposing**

"All these coercive actions can be a great defeat and failure. "All countries involved in this process, it would be better to focus on the procedure before the ESPOO convention, than to do things that violate international conventions," says Kovacevic.

The negative impact on the canyon of the river Tara, which is part of the national park, is

worrying. However, the Ministry of Physical Planning and Ecology in the Republic of Srpska, which is the so-called focal point, which was the response of the Council of Ministers to environmental associations, when they sought answers. Srebrenka Golic, the relevant minister from RS, said that Serbia and Montenegro were informed about everything and that the claims of non-governmental organizations were not true.

“Given that nothing has changed either in force or on the ground, we used a previous environmental impact study, to which there were no objections, and we only renewed the environmental permit in accordance with legal procedures,” Golic said.

However, we should also remind ourselves of the RS Government’s agreement with the German company RWE on a strategic partnership and construction of the hydropower potential of the upper Drina basin from 2012, which was terminated after only a few months. The project worth 460 million euros failed and the Germans withdrew, leaving no possibility for partial realization.

Source: wdr.de