

According to the findings of an investigation by the Centre for Investigative Journalism of Montenegro, CIN-CG, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, BIRN, and the weekly news magazine Monitor, authorities in Montenegro are allowing dangerous waste from a number of companies to pollute the Zeta, to the alarm of residents who say their health is being affected.

The country's Water Administration has no register of the pollutants entering the Zeta, while a CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor journalist found evidence that wastewater is still flowing from pipes belonging to companies that have no permit for such discharge.

"We asked the Institute of Public Health of Montenegro to monitor the health of people from the area because we've had a high mortality rate due to cancer for several years, which was not the case in previous years," Djurickovic told CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor.

"The Institute told us that they cannot make a statement as per this request now due to the increased workload caused by the coronavirus epidemic."

The Institute did not respond to questions concerning this story.

'Unpleasant, uncharacteristic odour'

In 2019, tests conducted by the Department for Water Quality at the Hydrometeorological Institute of Montenegro, HMZCG, confirmed the "very poor" quality of water in the rivers Zeta, Moraca, Bojana and Cehotina and discovered a drop in the population of invertebrates that are particularly sensitive to pollution.

The Department, however, said it was "not technically equipped" to determine the effect on fish stocks in the river or on food produced in the fields that are irrigated by its waters and, therefore, on the health of those living by the river.

"But these tests will have to be performed, by equipping the laboratory of the Institute or by hiring other laboratories," Nevenka Tomic, head of the Department, told CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor.

In October 2019, a specialist veterinary laboratory examined fish caught in the Zeta. On cooking, the fish gave off an "unpleasant odour uncharacteristic of this type of fish," the laboratory reported.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, fish stocks in the river are being affected by "municipal wastewater, mostly loaded with organic material," and discharge from a nearby pig farm, chicken farm, dairy and slaughterhouse as well as urban settlements.

CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor journalist, travelling along the river by boat on July 15, 2020 from Danilovgrad to Grbe noticed numerous pipes from which waste flowed.

Besides the city drainage, there were pipes from the Mermer and Siskovic Quarries, the Lazine Dairy, the Monte Bianco Cheese Factory, the Primato-P Slaughterhouse and the Neksan-Cavor Pig Farm. The river gave off an unpleasant odour and the water was turbid. That day, unlike a year ago, there was no wastewater from the drains of the Primato-P Slaughterhouse or the nearby construction company Eurozox.

Djurickovic and his neighbours have been protesting for months, and in October 2019 they filed criminal charges against Dragan Cavor, owner of the Niksen-Cavor pig farm. Public prosecutors in Podgorica, however, said they were no grounds for prosecution. "The system does not protect us," said Djurickovic. "We demand that the law be applied to all companies."

According to that law, any company whose activities may affect the Zeta River ecosystem must have a wastewater treatment system and a water permit. An environmental impact assessment should also be made.

The Water Administration told CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor that of all the companies in Danilovgrad with pipes running into the Zeta, only the Mermer and Sisković quarries hold water permits as do Zeta Energy, Senca, Eco Petrol and Jugopetrol. The permits run for a period of 10 years and are currently valid.

The Niksen-Cavor pig farm and Primato-P slaughterhouse do not hold valid permits for the discharge of wastewater into the Zeta. Temporary, 12-month permits they acquired at the end of May 2018 expired on May 31, 2019, the Water Administration told CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor.

Dragan Cavor, however, said his farm did not need a permit since it hasn't discharged "a drop of wastewater" into the river since December 2019, i.e. seven months after the permit had already expired.

Cavor said he now separates the waste into solid fertiliser and water for irrigation. "Since we do not discharge water into the Zeta River, there is no need to have a water permit," he told CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor.

Yet on July 15, 2020, a CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor witnessed a brownish liquid flowing into the river at the point where wastewater was previously discharged from Cavor's pig farm and the slaughterhouse. It smelt of faeces.

"I claim under moral, material and criminal liability that these waste waters no longer go from the farm," Cavor said. "The institutions in charge should find out where they come from. It is technically not feasible, because our drain was concreted in the presence of a water inspector."

Water inspectors checked the pig farm twice, in January and February 2020, and concluded

that everything was in order.

“At the moment, the pig farm does not pollute the environment as far as wastewater is concerned,” Cavor said “Everything we were ordered to do in the middle of last year, we did.”

Manure, urine, blood

But Biologist Vuk Ikovic said untreated wastewater containing manure and urine was still being discharged into the Zeta.

“Knowing the activity of the surrounding companies, this wastewater comes either from the Primato-P Slaughterhouse or from the pig farm, or from both companies,” said Ikovic, arguing that the blame most likely lay in improper fertiliser management.

“If the investor does not have a water or environmental permit, and at the same time performs his activities, it is the same as driving a public transport bus, and you do not have a driver’s license.”

Under the Law on Waters, any company found discharging wastewater into rivers without the necessary permit faces being banned from operating.

The Primato-P Slaughterhouse has been temporarily suspended from working twice in the past four years after tests found the wastewater it was discharging had higher than permitted concentrations of harmful substances.

During an inspection of the slaughterhouse on May 29 2020, inspectors noted the lack of any device to measure the amount of water being discharged into the river.

The owner, Panto Vucurovic, told CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor that the device had been ordered from neighbouring Serbia and would soon be installed. That, and some administrative confusion, was behind the fact he does not hold a valid permit, he said. Regardless, he confirmed continuing to discharge wastewater into the Zeta.

Vucurovic told CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor that only purified water from his slaughterhouse was flowing into the river. In February 2020, however, inspectors said blood was flowing too, resulting in a fine of 1,400 euros.

Inspectors in the dark

During 2018 and 2019, no one from the territory of Danilovgrad submitted data to the Environmental Protection Agency on the release of pollutants, despite a requirement under the Environmental Law and the Rulebook on the Detailed Content and Manner of Keeping the Cadastre of Environmental Pollutants.

“The two biggest polluters - the Niksen-Cavor Pig Farm and the Lazine Dairy do not have environmental consents,” said Ikovic. “Hence, they could not even start their operations, but

they have been using the Zeta River as a place for unloading their waste for years.” Cavor told CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor that the possibility of an environment impact assessment was being looked at.

The Lazine Dairy told CIN-CG/BIRN/Monitor that its assessment had been made in 2003. Ikovic, however, said the dairy had exceeded the capacity stated in the original study and that a new Law on Environmental Impact Assessment was adopted in 2008, meaning the dairy should conduct a new one.

Ikovic said that the authorities bore part of the blame.

“They are paid to provide for a healthy environment and the health of the citizens,” he said. Under the Law on Waters, the Water Administration is responsible for the ‘water information system’, which, for example, lists pollutants entering rivers so that inspectors know what they are looking for.

Source: balkaninsight.com