

Bankwatch Romania today submitted a complaint to the **European Commission**, seeking to reverse an Emergency Ordinance of the Romanian Government, which greenlights nine destructive hydropower projects and is considered to breach three European Union Directives.

The [hydropower projects](#) would damage two national parks and twenty Natura2000 sites, and were all exempted from environmental impact assessment requirements in December 2022. Several of these projects have already been found illegal by the Romanian justice system, so the contested Government decision is yet another move to legalise them.

State-owned utility **Hidroelectrica** has been attempting to build a series of hydropower plants for several decades already. All of the projects covered by the Emergency Ordinance are 20 to 45 years old, but the Parliament and Government have attempted to revive them in recent years.

The Emergency Ordinance entered into force on 14 December 2022 and, although still not approved as law by the Parliament, it produced legal effect immediately after its adoption. Already on 28 March 2023, the **Ministry of Environment in Romania** exempted six of the nine hydropower plants from requiring a screening decision for the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process.

In addition, the Government intends to use public EU funds for these projects, through the REPowerEU chapter of its recovery plan, which conflicts with EU rules to ensure that recovery

projects fulfil so-called 'do no significant harm' criteria.

Bankwatch Romania argues that exempting such projects from the requirement to carry out an environmental impact assessment is allowed only under very exceptional and clearly-defined circumstances. 'But the government vaguely argues that the ordinance is needed due to "energy

security", failing to elaborate how much energy is missing compared to what is needed, over what timeframe, why exactly those specific projects are the key ones which are needed, why applying the **EIA** procedure would adversely affect this goal, and why energy security could not be achieved by other means instead. It does not explain exactly what the emergency is, nor when the plants would be expected to come online and help remedy the situation', they state.

Ioana Ciuta, Bankwatch Romania — 'These projects belong in history books; they have not proved their worth in the decades that they have been around. If the government was honest about security of supply, it would have needed to prioritise measures to make a difference much more quickly, such as energy savings and installing rooftop solar and heat

## European Commission urged to act on destructive hydropower projects in Romanian protected areas

pumps, as well as low-impact utility scale projects outside of sensitive areas. It's hard to believe anyone would knowingly choose to destroy nature, when we so desperately need it for our water, food and climate regulation'.

The **European Commission** initiated an infringement procedure against [Romania](#) already in 2015 over small [hydropower projects](#) built in protected areas, but it still has not been concluded. The destruction potential of the current Emergency Ordinance should encourage the Commission to speed up this case. Bankwatch Romania expects the Commission to open an investigation into the Emergency Ordinance as soon as possible.

Source: Bankwatch