

According to officials from Belgrade and Priština, Lake Gazivode was among the items in the documents that Kosovo and Serbia signed in Washington on September 4.

“The importance of water from Lake Gazivoda to the socio-economic development of Kosovo is enormous,” Dragiša Miljačić, coordinator of the working group of the EU National Convention for Chapter 35, which also applies to Kosovo, told the BBC.

“It is a strategic resource that significantly affects all life, economic and energy flows in Kosovo.” The agreements suggest that Priština and Belgrade could agree on some kind of joint sovereignty over Lake Gazivoda, Spetim Gashi of the Council for Inclusive told the BBC.

Lake Gazivode covers an area of about 12 square kilometers. Slightly more than nine are on the territory of Kosovo, while the rest are in Serbia property. The lake is the main source of water for cities such as Kosovska Mitrovica and Gračanica, but also Priština. The water from the lake cools the turbines of the “Obilić” power plant, which would not work without it, and it also regulates the supply of electricity to Kosovo. Lake Gazivoda is managed by a Serbian public company, while the Ibar-Lepenc hydro system is managed by two managements – Kosovo’s “Ibar Lepenc” and Serbia’s “Ibar”, says Gashi. The first is located in South Mitrovica, while the second is in Zubin Potok and the companies do not recognize each other.

However, despite many tensions since the war, the Ibar-Lepenc hydro system is operating without interruption due to interdependence, he added.

“While the water of Gazivoda is located in Zubin Potok, where the majority of Serbs live, the water processing factory is located in southern Mitrovica, where Albanians live.”

The agreement in Washington put the issue of the lake on the agenda for the first time, Miljačić thinks.

Earlier, Belgrade proposed that the ownership of the system be entrusted to the Association of Serbian Municipalities, or that a mixed company be established in which the Serbian electric power industry would have half of the ownership, Priština rejected both proposals. “Ownership of the system is disputable because it was built from a World Bank loan repaid (and still repaid) by Serbia,” Miljačić said. Serbia also has the technical possibility of diverting the Ibar River, which supplies Lake Gazivode, which would dry it out and thus leave Kosovo without much-needed water, he added.

“Therefore, opening the issue of managing Lake Gazivode is very important and represents a possible point of cooperation that would be applied to all other spheres of society.”

The point referring to Gazivode states that a study will be conducted with the American Ministry of Energy on the division of lakes as a source of energy and water, says Gashi.

“Kosovo is already using the lake both as water and as a source of energy,” he says.

“How Serbia will use Lake Gazivode as a source of water and energy is neither technically nor politically clear. The North also uses the lake as drinking water and energy.”

Before the agreements were signed, the president of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, called on the Prime Minister of Kosovo not to sign it precisely because of the point that refers to Gazivode. The Self-Determination Movement would not have signed the agreement in Washington if it had been in power, even if mutual recognition was part of it, said former Kosovo Foreign Minister Glauk Konjufca.

“Lake Gazivode is owned by Kosovo, or until three days ago, it is no longer the same. This topic has been put on the negotiating table for the first time, with a feasibility team being created to consider sharing ” he said.

“Such an agreement for Lake Gazivode, where Serbia gets the infrastructure it wants, with ‘mini-Schengen’, with the suspension of membership (Kosovo in international organizations), even with the Community from the inside, I don’t think Albin Kurti would sign it as prime minister,” said Konjufca, reports Kosovo Online.

Albanian politicians in Kosovo, including the prime minister, are not thrilled with the agreement, but have had to give in to US pressure, Gashi said.

“Their main argument is that domestic resources should not be shared with another state. However, they do not have enough power to prevent its implementation if the Trump administration is behind it,” he added.

In Kosovo, political positioning is in force before a decision is made to confirm or reject the indictment against Hashim Thaci and Kadri Veselji before the Special Court in The Hague, Miljačić says.

“In these circumstances, politicians such as Ramush Haradinaj are trying to further profile themselves with national-oriented voters by sending messages that do not meet any agreements with Serbia, including the management of the Gazivode system,” he said.

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