

The picturesque Kosinj valley still disappears under the water of the new accumulation lake

At its 71st session held on July 29, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted a decision declaring the Kosinj Hydropower System project a strategic investment project of the Republic of Croatia.

The decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia to declare the Kosinj Hydropower System project (HES Kosinj) a strategic investment project, worth HRK 1,539,003,977.00 (excluding VAT), was made at the proposal of the Commission for Evaluation and Determination of Strategic Project Proposals. Namely, on 23 February 2021, the Commission assessed that the proposed project met the prescribed criteria of the Croatian Strategic Investment Projects Act (OG 29/18 and 114/18), on the basis of which the Ministry of the Economy and Sustainable Development issued a Decision on its inclusion in the List of Strategic Projects and appointed Kristina Čelić, Director of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Head of the Task Force for Project Preparation and Implementation.

The project includes the construction of the reservoir Kosinj with dams Kosinj, Sedlo and Bakovac, injection curtains, Kosinj hydroelectric power plant with accompanying facilities, reconstruction of the existing hydroelectric power plant Sklope, construction of replacement roads, and connection to the electricity transmission network over 110 kV switchyard and 2 x 110 kV OHL and connection to the 10 (20) kV electricity distribution network, is stated in the explanation of the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia.

With the adoption of this decision, the Agreement on the preparation and implementation of the strategic project of HES Kosinj, concluded on July 12 between the investors - Hrvatska elektroprivreda and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, enters into force, HEP announced. "HES Kosinj, along with Hidroelektrana Senj 2, is one of the two segments of the overall project of upgrading the existing Hydropower System Senj (HES Senj) worth HRK 3.4 billion, which makes it the largest HEP project since Croatia's independence," HEP said in a statement.

The Kosinj valley needs development, not immersion!

It should be reminded that four years ago, WWF Adria and Zelena akcija appealed to the then Ministry of Environmental Protection and Energy to assess the project of building the Kosinj hydroelectric power plant as unacceptable for the environment. At the protest held on November 16, 2017 on the occasion of the end of the public debate on the Environmental Impact Study for HES Kosinj, to which the Green Action submitted detailed explanations, it was warned that this project has no economic justification, but therefore has "irreparable

bad effect on human life and the environment ”.

A joint statement from WWF Adria and Zelena akcija pointed out that this is an old HEP project, conceived more than 40 years after the construction of HPP Sklope, which envisages the construction of the Kosinj hydroelectric power plant and the associated reservoir on the Lika River, with the already existing HPP Sklope and the Kruščica reservoir. As confirmed by the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, in addition to the hydroelectric power plant and the accumulation lake, the construction of three dams (Kosinj, Sedlo, Bakovac) is also envisaged. WWF Adria and Zelena akcija warned that from the environmental point of view, “perhaps the most questionable is the construction of a 6 km long injection curtain”. This would pump over 75,000 tons of cement into sensitive underground ecosystems to ensure the water sustainability of the reservoir in this porous, karst terrain”.

At the time, WWF Adria expressed great concern about the poor quality of the Environmental Impact Study, but also the impact of the entire HES Kosinj project on the Kosinj microregion. “The impact study is deficient, based on outdated studies and data, and does not answer key questions from the aspect of environmental protection,” said Irma Popović Dujmović from WWF Adria, pointing to the fact that “the impact of dams on the environment and human life is always significant, while their benefits are often overestimated and the social and environmental consequences underestimated”.

The biggest consequences will be felt by the local population

Apart from the fact that the Kosinj HES project is planned in a naturally valuable area that partially overlaps with the NATURA 2000 ecological network, it will have a detrimental impact on species and habitats - for example, Austropotamobius pallipes, and the injection curtain can “strongly, abruptly and it is possible to dangerously change the properties of karst aquifers and groundwater circulation processes in the local (possibly regional) area ”, WWF Adria and Zelena akcija pointed out that they will have the greatest impact on the inhabitants of the Kosinj Valley and surrounding areas”.

Disregard for the local population is visible in the fact that the existence of other possibilities for the development of this area and the existence of alternative energy projects that would produce more electricity, which do not provide for the sinking of the Kosinj Valley, or displacement of the population, is absolutely ignored”, said Zeljka Leljak Gracin. the then president of Green Action.

Also, fears were expressed that the project would cause further deterioration of microclimatic conditions for the population of the surrounding areas, while “predictions of possible positive effects, such as the development of agriculture in Lipovo polje and tourist

facilities on the new reservoir, are based on outdated studies and / or Environmental Impact Studies”.

Although extensive, the Environmental Impact Study for HES Kosinj does not contain research results for all areas, nor is it based on the latest data, especially those related to the impact on the population. Due to all the above, WWF Adria and Green Action considered that the only possible decision should be that this project is not environmentally friendly.

The goal is to increase electricity production

However, as stated in the explanation of the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, the goal and effects of the project are to increase electricity production, 230 GWh more per year, ie 22% compared to the current production of “Senj Hydropower System”, approx. 130 GWh or 20% in relation to the existing peak energy production. With the construction of the Kosinj reservoir, the Government of the Republic of Croatia expects an increase in the level of utilization of water quantities in the Lika and Gacka rivers by reducing overflow losses. Namely, he hopes to achieve a high level of flood protection in the downstream area - Lipovo polje and Kosinjska dolina, which in the current conditions flood almost every year.

Source: Ekovjesnik