

For the first time the local Government of the Vjosa Valley in a public reaction stayed against the hydro-power plants. After the local community, national and international NGOs, scientists and the European Parliament this time also the mayors have unified their voice to protect the Vjosa. The mayors of Përmet, Tepelenë, Memaliaj, Mallakastër and Selenicë sent an open letter to the Prime Minister Edi Rama and Head of the Albanian Parliament Ilir Meta raising the concern of the local communities that they represent.

In a roundtable organized by EcoAlbania, the mayors faced with the situation where the whole valley of Vjosa is facing threatened be turned into a huge hydro-park, have taken this public initiative asking to the central government to reconsider the plans to build hydropower plants in Vjosë and its tributaries. “We as a local authority were not informed officially about the plans to build the Poçem hydropower and the affected residents were not part of the public consultations,” said Agron Kapllanaj, mayor of Mallakastër.

The local community’s concern on the lack of transparency regarding the Poçem HPP have been raised before on both sides of the river, as well as in the lawsuit filed by the residents and environmental organizations. “The Vjosa case is not just an environmental issue but it has also to do with the functioning of the rule of law and democracy in the country. The residents of the valley are those who should be part of decision-making for such projects that directly affect their lives and their future,” said Olsi Nika, from EcoAlbania.

The Vjosa valley offers a high potential for tourism development and scientific research because of its natural integrity. The river is closely related to the daily life of the inhabitants of the area, offering opportunities for the development of agriculture, fisheries and tourism as the main source of future economic development. The Vjosa is a cultural and historical heritage of the country. “We have other plans for the valley – the tourism development. The hydropower construction mines this potential. Tepelena has many natural and historical treasures that must be promoted and developed in a sustainable way,” said Tërmet Peci, the mayor of Tepelena.

Specifically the representatives of the LGU-s of the Vjosa request to the Albanian Government:

To re-consider hydropower projects along the Vjosa River and its tributaries

To undertake initiatives for cancellation of concessionary contracts related to the construction of hydropower plants along the Vjosa River and its tributaries.

To ensure the implementation of mechanisms for community participation in decision-making process as foreseen in the Albanian legislation.

Cooperate with the Vjosa valley’s LGU-s and other stakeholders, to explore strategies for sustainable economic development for the area considering development projects that do

## The local government joined forces against the hydro-power plants on the Vjosa

not affect the integrity of the river and guarantee the protection of our natural heritage. To require full transparency by the Greek Government for the interstate agreements regarding the Vjosa River.

With the support of LëvizAlbania-“the local democracy in action” programe and the Swiss Embassy in Albania, EcoAlbania is working to strengthen the mechanism of the community participation in decision-making.

*Source: Ecoalbania*