

Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) have established a joint working group to address challenges associated with the Buk Bijela hydropower project, located on the border between the two countries, according to an announcement from the Energy Community Secretariat, which facilitates the dialogue.

At an inaugural meeting of the joint working group at the premises of the Energy Community Secretariat in Vienna, Austria, the two sides formulated a comprehensive roadmap with specific timelines, which envisages a structured approach to resolving the outstanding issues regarding the Buk Bijela hydropower project.

Montenegro and BiH agreed a roadmap to address outstanding issues

At the meeting, **Montenegro** emphasized the project should undergo a new environmental impact assessment (EIA) process with transboundary consultations, given that the previous EIA permit had expired, according to a report from the meeting. Montenegro also noted that the project had been subject to a court case in BiH, which annulled the extension of the environmental permit, forcing the developers to seek a new permit.

Montenegro wants a new environmental impact assessment, but BiH says it could agree to revise the permit to ensure the project doesn't harm Montenegro's environment

BiH, for its part, noted that the project remained unchanged and that there was no need for a fresh EIA before the issuing of the new environmental permit. BiH also noted that the project's environmental permit was annulled in the first place based on a procedural shortcoming.

Representatives of BiH, however, expressed readiness to review the environmental permit and possibly revise it based on a new EIA if it can be concluded that the project could have an adverse negative impact on the environment of Montenegro.

The Energy Community Secretariat, for its part, said it is important to implement any EIA in line with the fundamental provisions of the European Union's EIA Directive.

BiH further said that the project currently holds a construction permit for preparatory works, but that no construction permit has been issued for the whole project yet.

Buk Bijela is a joint project between Serbia and the Republic of Srpska

The 93 MW Buk Bijela hydropower plant, valued at about EUR 220 million, is being developed by Serbia and the Republic of Srpska, one of the two political entities of BiH. Serbia's state power utility Elektroprivreda Srbije (EPS) holds a 51% stake, while the remaining 49% is owned by the Republic of Srpska's state power utility, Elektroprivreda Republike Srpske (ERS).

In 2021, Montenegro and the Republic of Srpska agreed to set up a joint expert team to assess the hydropower plant's possible impact on the Tara river in Montenegro, following warnings by environmental organizations.

The Energy Community Secretariat will help implement the roadmap and address challenges

The role of the Energy Community Secretariat is to coordinate the dialogue and ensure that all stakeholders are informed and engaged. It is also offering guidance and support to the working group to implement the tasks outlined in the roadmap and address challenges, according to the statement. The group will convene again in September.

Buk Bijela is the first phase of a larger joint project between Serbia and the Republic of Srpska, which includes building two more hydropower plants on the Drina - Foča, of 44 MW, and Paunci, of 43 MW.

Source: Balkan green energy news