

Recently, news reported on fire on the Montenegrin territory of the lake, where a fisherman's house from the non-governmental organization "Carp Security", which deals with the prevention of carp poaching during the spawning of that type of fish (from mid-March to mid-May), was set on fire. Protected Skadar Lake is traditionally a link between criminal activities on the route Montenegro - Albania. It became a hotbed of crime during the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, when due to the breakup of Yugoslavia and numerous sanctions, this large area of water proved ideal for smuggling goods such as alcohol, fuel, clothing and drugs, on the Albania-Montenegro route. This continued until the fall of Slobodan Milosevic and Montenegro's independence from Serbia in 2006, when smugglers changed activities and became poachers, especially for carp, which is considered a fish delicacy.

In an age of worsening climate change, environmental activists, aware of the consequences, are increasingly defending their natural resources from various poaching and other illegal activities, often with their lives.

The poachers were angered by the "insolence" of eco-activists who patrol the lake at night, take out fishing nets and release the caught fish. Because of that, they set fire to a fishing house in the town of Malo Blato, sending a message of open threat, not only to activists, but also to the National Park of Montenegro, which manages the protected Skadar Lake.

However, the activists did not allow themselves to be frightened, but removed new fishing nets the day after the fire. And they said the same through media channels. They point out that "the number of threats against them is not even known" and that all that remains is "to put a bullet in their head". The smoldering conflict between poachers and activists has been going on for some time, with the former breaking cars, punching tires, punching ships, threatening verbally and physically.

From the network of organizations Coalition for Sustainable Development (KOR), they demanded the resignation of the director of the public company National Park of Montenegro, the body in charge of managing all national parks in the country. According to the KOR, Director Elvir Klica "has shown countless times that he manages the national good entrusted to him in a non-domestic way and that he is not up to the challenge of managing the most important resource that Montenegro has." And indeed, the crime on Skadar Lake takes place unhindered, sometimes only 50 meters from the administrative building of the Park. To warn of this, activists made a performance and hired the Basic State Prosecutor's

Office to pass on information about illegal activities to them. But instead of helping fight crime, they themselves received a criminal complaint for illegal performance. And this despite the fact that they also handed over footage of an attack by one of the supervisors on his volunteer who was trying to prevent poaching. Instead of a supervisor and a poacher, the report was earned by an activist, and the two were not even sanctioned.

Namely, the park is supervised by only 16 supervisors, half of whom are on sick leave at any given time, and some even for a year. Their work is often done by volunteer activists at their own expense. Poachers are also better equipped than NPs, have faster ships and are difficult to catch. Despite the prescribed financial fines of 20,000 euros and prison sentences of up to three years, for poaching on Skadar Lake, it is rare that any violator has been prosecuted. Last year, the European Commission warned of huge state failures in this field in its Report on Montenegro's progress towards the EU. The Commission considers that environmental activism is becoming an increasingly dangerous task in Montenegro and warns the state to urgently protect such groups of people.

The Coalition for Sustainable Development believes that it is necessary: "Suspend all supervisors of the Skadar Lake National Park, as well as director Nenad Ivanovic in order to investigate the possible connection between supervisors and poachers, which the public has been pointing out for years and the authorities are silent." Strengthen police patrols and surveillance of access roads to Skadar Lake and protect anti-poaching NGO activists.

Increase the number of freshwater fisheries inspectors and amend the legislation so that poaching is recognized as a serious crime and not that misdemeanor charges are written to poachers and that poaching equipment and equipment is returned to them. The director of JP NPCG, Elvir Klica, must urgently resign, because he has shown countless times that he manages the national good entrusted to him in a non-domestic way and that he is not up to the challenge of managing the most important resource that Montenegro has. We have to react today, because tomorrow may be late. "

Skadar Lake is the largest lake in Montenegro and the Balkans with an area of 369.7 km² (of which Montenegro belongs to 221 km and Albania (Shkoder) about 148 km²). It is 40 kilometers long from Vranjina to Shkodra, and 14 kilometers wide in some places. Depth of 4 to 6 meters, and further and further towards the west hill is even greater. It changes size according to the seasons, and receives water from many rivers. It flows along the river Bojana into the Adriatic Sea. It is full of islets with numerous valuable archeological sites and valuable cultural heritage. The only pelican habitat in the south of Europe is located on Skadar Lake.

Source: bilten.org



Montenegro: Crime threatens environment and biodiversity on Skadar Lake