

The salt pans near coastal town Ulcinj were established in the 1920s and provided a good life for workers and the birds that nested there. The whole area later belonged once to the state-owned salt company Bajo Sekulic, which was privatized in 2002. After bankruptcy in 2012, the salt pans stopped pumping out fresh water and pumping in saltwater, and with it, food for the birds. That endangered the habitat of around 250 bird species, including numerous rare species such as the Dalmatian pelicans and flamingos as well as spoonbills. In 2014, a plan was drawn up to convert almost 15 square kilometers of the ponds, channels and banks into a touristic development complex with hotels and golf courses.

Montenegrin government announced that the abandoned salt plants at Salina in the coastal town of Ulcinj will be state property in a move to save an important habitat for about 250 bird species that live and nest there. Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic said the government's Privatization and Capital Projects Council rejected the request of the bankrupt private salt company Bajo Sekulic for property rights to the area.

"Land with a total area of 14.5 square kilometers [will be] permanent state property of Montenegro," Krivokapic posted on Twitter.

The former government approved this plan but changed its mind after a dramatic intervention by the ambassadors of France, Germany and Poland who demanded the revival of the area's biodiversity, which requires the Ulcinj salt pans being put back into operation. They even said the issue could jeopardize the international reputation of Montenegro and its accession negotiations with the EU.

After months of pressure from the international community and environmental organisations, the National Parks and the board of trustees of the salt pans in 2015 signed a one-year contract by which the state is obliged to protect the environment and its biodiversity.

In June 2019, the municipality proclaimed Ulcinj Salina a nature park, which in September 2019 was also included on the Ramsar list, declaring it a wetland of international importance.

The European Commission progress report in 2020 praised the development in chapter 27 of the country's accession talks on environment and climate change.

The salt marsh is an important birding area and a major site for nesting, wintering and roosting on the east coast of the Adriatic. It has the status of IBA, Important Bird Area.

Source: balkaninsight.com