

Urged by the EU and environmental watchdogs, the Montenegrin government pledged additional measures to preserve the Balkan's largest lake, which could be threatened by a planned 'eco-resort' on its shores.

European Parliamentarians voiced concern on Monday over the Montenegrin government's plan to approve a new "eco-resort" on Skadar Lake, which has led to protests from environmentalists who fear it will threaten the national park's ecosystem and rare species. After a group of NGOs, supported by the several international organizations, launched a petition to save Skadar Lake, demanding the government put an immediate moratorium on new construction inside the lake's national park, several MEPs urged the government in Podgorica to undertake the protection and conservation measures to maintain the lake's ecological characteristics.

The amendments to the European Parliament's resolution on Montenegro, debated on Monday, urged the government to ensure that the project for a five-star resort does not have any negative impact on the protection of national parks in Montenegro.

An amendment filed by an MEP from Croatia, Zeljana Zovko, expressed "deep concern about threats to the ecological integrity and eco-touristic value" of Lake Skadar National Park due to the Porto Skadar Lake project, as the 75-million-euros-worth project is named. The construction plans include a hotel, 30 luxury villas with swimming pools, restaurants, marina and a commercial centre. Its location is at the mouth of the River Crnojevica and Skadar Lake, which is the largest freshwater lake in the Balkans and shared between Montenegro and neighbouring Albania.

Several hydropower projects are also planned, on the lake's major tributary, the river Moraca, which according to the environmentalists could further endangering biodiversity. A motion by MEPs Ulrike Lunacek, Terry Reintke, Igor Soltes on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group in the European Parliament, voiced concern about "unsustainable hydropower development", especially including hydropower plant developments on the Moraca river. Skadar lake was given national park status in 1983 and has been protected by the Ramsar Convention since 1996.

It is famous for its biodiversity, with 281 bird species, 50 mammal species and 48 species of fish, and it is an important reserve for wetland birds, in particular, the endangered Dalmatian pelican.

Local environmental groups said that the development of an "eco-resort" on its shores and several hydropower projects on its major tributary Moraca will damage biodiversity and harm endemic species found nowhere else.

In a study published on Friday, local watchdog Green Home questioned the reference of the

investor, local Montenegro Resort Company, claiming that it is not possible to trust that the project will comply with all the strictest European criteria or that it will bring prosperity to residents of the area.

The investor insisted it has carried out impact studies, promising that some of the profits will be used to keep the area clean.

Montenegro's government has also dismissed the accusations, saying all procedures "were in accordance with the law and good practice".

A building permit to the investor was issued according to the law, it added, and because of the sensitivity of the issue, additional research will be conducted on the site.

Source: balkaninsight