

The environmental permit for the construction of HPP Buk Bijela was issued on the basis of eight-year-old data, so the Montenegrin authorities have not determined in eight years whether the artificial lake that would be created by building a dam in Republika Srpska will spill over to Tara. Tara with Piva near Šćepan Polje makes the Drina, which further, up to the Sava, collects the waters of the rivers of the Black Sea basin.

The construction of the dam for a 93-megawatt (MW) power plant, for which a cornerstone was ceremoniously laid in early May, will cost about 220m euros, and is financed by the Serbian and Republika Srpska power companies. Serbian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Mining Zorana Mihajlovic said that it was planned to build "Buk Bijela" in four years, and Minister of Energy and Mining Petar Djokic announced an increase in the installed capacity to 115 to 120 MW. After "Buk Bijela", the construction of two smaller HPPs, Paunci and Foča, is planned, and the entire project is worth about 520 million euros. Bosnian and Montenegrin NGOs, joined by the Montenegrin government, argue that a new analysis of the environmental impact of dam construction must be made and the provisions of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) must be respected. The Implementation Committee of the Espoo Convention in Geneva should decide whether the Republika Srpska has followed the necessary procedures, whether this process has been done in accordance with European rules, and to make recommendations.

In May last year, the complaint was filed jointly by the Bosnian NGO Center for the Environment and the Aarhus Resource Center and Montenegro's Green Home and Ozon. Half a year later, at the initiative of Green Home, the state of Montenegro joined. According to CIN CG, non-governmental organizations from Bosnia and Montenegro filed a complaint with the European Energy Community (EnCom) against Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of June, for non-fulfillment of commitments in the construction of these HPPs.

The Aarhus Resource Center also reached the RS Supreme Court, demanding that the environmental construction permit be revoked, while the BiH Constitutional Court should decide on the request of 24 members of the Federation Parliament, who are requesting the suspension of the project.

Although the Bosnian entity is behaving rather disinterestedly in this case, and there is virtually no communication between Podgorica and Banja Luka on the project, BiH central authorities also oppose the construction, arguing that RS cannot make such decisions on its own. In addition, in 2017, the RS authorities signed a memorandum according to which the Chinese company China National Aero-technology International Engineering Corporation (AVIC ENG) will build the dam.

RS Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and Ecology spokeswoman Gorjana Rosić claims for CIN-CG that there is no need for new assessments, because there were no changes in the conditions under which the previous permit from 2013 was issued, and that Montenegro was informed about everything.

After the adoption of the Declaration on the Protection of Tara in 2004 in the Montenegrin Parliament, which bans all works in the canyon under the protection of UNESCO, the joint construction of “Buk Bijele”, which was planned by Montenegro and Republika Srpska, was abandoned. Now, the construction of smaller HPPs in Gornja Drina in RS has been actualized, as well as “Komarnice” and “Kruševa” in Montenegro.

Stop construction and do a new impact assessment

Nina Kreševljaković, an advisor at the Aarhus Resource Center, pointed out that only domestic authorities and the court have the right to stop the project.

“However, the adoption of complaints by Espoo and EnCom would establish that the Convention and the Treaty were violated by approving the project, and the RS authorities would be obliged to repeat the procedure and prepare a new study, so as not to further violate their international obligations,” she explained. is she.

Her colleague from the Montenegrin Green Home, Natasa Kovacevic, expects that the construction of the HPP will be stopped, until all the facts related to possible negative impacts on the environment and biodiversity of Tara are established. heritage and potentially Natura 2000 site.

The complaint of the non-governmental organizations explains that the development of the project for the construction of HPP “Buk Bijela”, in a smaller capacity, began in 2012, when the environmental impact assessment procedure was conducted. After concluding at the time that the project would not have a significant negative cross-border impact, Montenegro launched cross-border consultations.

This document also points out that the period of validity of the environmental permit is set at five years, and that the investor was obliged to submit a request for renewal of the permit three months before its expiration. However, it is added, the request for renewal of the license was submitted 20 days later. In May 2018, the RS Ministry still issued a decision on the renewal of the environmental permit. That it violated the regulations was confirmed by the verdict of the District Court in Banja Luka in May 2019, so the renewed environmental permit was annulled. It is one of the proceedings conducted by the Bosnian Aarhus Center. Although Montenegro has expressed its intention, the complaint adds, to participate in the new cross-border procedure as a potentially vulnerable party, the RS Ministry has continued

the environmental permitting process, without conducting a new environmental impact assessment procedure.

“The obligation to inform and initiate a new environmental impact assessment procedure is inevitable. The time of 7-8 years from the preparation of the Environmental Impact Study of the given plant and the issuance of the environmental permit is unacceptable”, it is pointed out in the complaint of the civil sector to the Board of the Espoo Convention.

In the meantime, the complaint explains, there have been significant changes – at the location of the project, in the legal framework, but also changes in the basic environmental assumptions. The 2012 impact assessment study, as well as the evidence attached to the 2019 environmental permit application, concludes the appeal, based on incomplete and outdated information that does not fully cover the impact on flora and fauna. The study, published in 2015, also emphasizes the importance of the Drina and its main tributaries, the Lima and Tara, as the longest habitat for the endangered trout “hucho hucho”, where as many as 30 percent of the total population of that species lives. In a study conducted by prof. dr Steven Weiss from the University of Graz and prof. Dr. Predrag Simonović from the University of Belgrade, concluded that the project of construction of HPP “Buk Bijela” would most likely have a negative impact on the ecosystem of the Tara River canyon, within the Durmitor National Park. Tara is recognized as one of the six main habitats for “hucho hucho” in the Balkans, and one of the three most important points on the peninsula for endangered fish species in general.

The findings of this study suggest that the Tara Canyon alone can provide very little habitat for spawning and rearing some of the most important fish species, such as juvenile, grayling, trout and scorpionfish, and therefore fish must migrate out of the canyon to reach suitable hatchery and complete their life cycle.

The study was conducted as part of the “Save the Blue Heart of Europe” campaign, launched by international environmental organizations in 2012, to protect the most valuable rivers in the Balkans from the construction of more than 3,000 planned hydropower plants.

The elevation dilemma at the boundary

State Secretary for Ecology in the Government of Montenegro Danilo Mrdak also points out that a precise geodetic measurement must be done, in order to determine the exact elevation of the river surface at the border, ie the level of the shore at the place where Tara and Piva meet. He explains that if 432 elevations of the river bottom are at the boundary, where the depth of the river is about two meters, then that elevation 434 means that the water reaches the boundary and will not sink further. This, he adds, can eventually happen

when there is heavy rain, when the inflow of water on the dam is greater than it can receive. He adds that it should have been done earlier, but he claims that it is not too late now, that it is a simple geodetic survey, which lasts two or three days, and that he will initiate it to be done in agreement with the Government. He explains that whether the power will be 93 or 120 MW does not change anything and does not affect Montenegro. However, unlike his colleagues who did the mentioned study, Mrdak says that the artificial lake can only have a good effect on the fish on the Montenegrin territory, and that it will provide them with refuge and salvation and that they will not be able to poke there, as now. Tari.

Kreševljaković states that, according to the Environmental Impact Study from 2012, the maximum elevation of the reservoir will be 434 meters above sea level, ie. the same as the normal elevation, while Montenegro claims that the altitude at the international border is 432.37 m.

"This means that the accumulation would still include a part of the territory of Montenegro," Kreševljaković emphasized.

Nevertheless, she points out that an impact on the Tara River canyon can certainly be expected, especially on the fish that live in it, because the area around the planned power plant most likely serves as a hatchery and breeding ground for many fish species living in the Tara River canyon.

Natasa Kovacevic says that the construction of the hydroelectric power plant "Buk Bijela" brings significant water modification and degradation of biodiversity in the length of 30 kilometers in BiH, while it is not clearly defined and presented how large this impact will be on the territory of Montenegro.

She claims that the impacts on Montenegro have not been assessed in terms of possible accidents (large landslides, landslides, induced earthquakes by water masses, overflow of other hydroelectric power plants, constitutional failures) and other cumulative impacts such as climate change, extreme waters and the like.

"HPP Buk Bijela will lead to fragmentation of the habitat of juveniles and other endangered fish species, which proves that the construction project of HPP Buk Bijela would most likely have a negative impact on the ecosystem of the Tara River canyon, within the Durmitor National Park," Kovacevic said.

Source: vijesti.me