

Located in the Șureanu Mountains within a protected Natura 2000 site, the hydro plant on the Taia river has been opposed by environmentalists ever since plans for the project first emerged in 2008. In May 2023, environmentalists were targeted with a strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP), a tactic used to intimidate and silence environmental organisations and citizens that advocate for the protection of key ecosystems...

The saga dates back to 2008 when Italian investor SC Hidro Clear SRL was granted 400 square metres of land to build a small hydropower plant on the Taia river. Plans for the operation of the plant involved diverting water from two sources, the Valea Popii and Aușelu rivers, into a 7.5-kilometre underground pipeline...

As highlighted by **Călin Dejeu**, a leading campaigner on the case and a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), in his numerous open letters to state institutions and frequent interventions in the media, a priority habitat located upstream of the Taia gorge was illegally deforested in 2013. But it was only in 2015 that Hunedoara Environmental Protection Agency issued the environmental permit for the construction of the project. The **hydropower plant** was eventually built and began operating illegally until 2017 when the Hunedoara Tribunal declared the environmental permit and screening decision null and void. However, this blatant violation of the rule of law is not an isolated incident...

In 2016, Bankwatch Romania mounted a legal challenge against the screening decision and environmental permit. At the Hunedoara Tribunal, the court of first instance, both administrative acts were annulled. This ruling was later confirmed as final by the Alba Iulia Court of Appeal in 2018. As part of the final decision, the court also ordered the restoration of the Taia river and the affected area to its original state. However, neither of these orders have been implemented to date. Following the court's decision, operations at the plant ceased, allowing the **Taia river** to flow freely once again...

Only a few months into the trial, in a baffling about-turn, the judge decided to reject the requests of non-governmental organisations to suspend and revoke the environmental permit, thus completely reversing the 2018 ruling.

This is unlikely to be the last time we see the back of this case, given that Bankwatch Romania and Agent Green are among the most active environmental organisations in **Romania** when it comes to defending the environment in court. But this latest twist is quite the escalation if we consider the broader context of the illiberal legislative package recently tabled by the Romanian government aimed at intimidating civil society and preventing them from asserting their rights in court, including substantial financial costs of up to EUR 10 000



Romania: Environmental activists confront SLAPP and unjust legal reversal in battle to protect Taia River from hydropower project

for challenging administrative acts...

Despite the gravity of these legal violations and the blatant disregard shown towards nature and the well-being of this generation and those to come, environmental activists, citizens and the experts who stand by them will not be intimidated...**This emerging anti-democratic and anti-European cross-party trend in Romania must be stopped.**

Source: Business & Human Rights