

Southeast Europe is experiencing a wave of hydropower projects. In a region with a deadly combination of Europe's last wild rivers, rampant corruption and inadequate nature protection, the potential for damage is immense.

All financial institutions need to disclose all of their planned and approved loans for hydropower projects and to adopt or better implement stricter environmental standards including no-go zones on rivers of outstanding quality. Some also need to tighten up their criteria on lending to politically exposed persons.

The EU too can play an important role. As well as better supervising the financial institutions in which it has a decision-making role (the EIB and EBRD) and better regulating EU companies operating outside the EU, it needs to be more active in promoting the adoption of EU nature and water protection legislation in accession countries and the countries of the Energy Community. Ultimately, if the problems caused by hydropower plants are not prevented in these countries, the whole renewable energy sector will face a backlash.

Multilateral development banks need to:

- Adopt and/or better implement hydropower sustainability criteria and establish clear no-go zones in protected areas and rivers of outstanding quality.

- Publish project information about hydropower projects (and others with a clear environmental impact) which are financed through financial intermediaries.

- Pay increased attention to the issue of corruption and politically exposed persons' involvement in hydropower plant projects and their benefitting from feed-in tariffs.

- Commercial banks, export credit agencies and national development banks need to:

- Systematically disclose information about which infrastructure projects, including hydropower, they have financed and are planning to finance and what environmental standards are being used to assess them.

- If not having done so already, adopt hydropower sustainability criteria and establish clear no-go zones in protected areas and rivers of outstanding quality.

- Pay increased attention to the issue of corruption and politically exposed persons' involvement in hydropower plant projects and their benefitting from feed-in tariffs.

- The national governments of the countries in the region need to:

- Where not done already, transpose and implement the Birds and Habitats Directives and

- Water Framework Directive.

- Establish clear no-go zones in protected areas and rivers of outstanding quality.

- Publish up-to-date project information about hydropower plants in a central registry.

The European Commission needs to:

- Provide increased assistance to countries in transposing and implementing the Birds and Habitats Directives and Water Framework Directive.
 - Continue to pay attention to the issue of inappropriate hydropower development (both in terms of environment and corruption) during its annual assessments of accession countries' progress towards the EU.
 - The European Commission and Energy Community need to:
 - Consider how elements of the Birds and Habitats Directives and Water Framework Directive could be adapted to the Energy Community Treaty to reduce the negative impact of hydropower projects.
 - Include the updated 2014 version of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive in the Energy -Community acquis as well as the Directive on Strategic Environmental Impact assessment.
 - Pay increased attention to the quality of Strategic Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments and public consultation processes in relation to hydropower projects.
 - Recommendations for NGOs
 - Put more pressure on the EBRD and EIB to disclose all hydropower financing including through financial intermediaries and adopt/better implement sustainability criteria including no-go zones
 - Take co-ordinated action to approach commercial banks and ask them to disclose project information and adopt sustainability criteria including no-go zones
 - Use the experience from Bulgaria, which is relatively well documented, to prevent harmful development in other countries.
 - Work together to refine and update the database created for this project
- source: Euronatur&Riverwatch