

The Drina River and its tributaries, among other strictly protected species, represent the world's most important habitat for globally endangered fish species – mladica (Hucho hucho) and therefore it is necessary to stop plans to build three dams for Buk Bijela hydro-power plant on its upper course in Foca and to protect this unique river, warn environmentalists, lovers of rivers and extreme water sports, according to a statement from the Center for the Environment.

Viktor Bjelic from the Center for the Environment in Banja Luka warns that the construction of the planned hydro-accumulations on the Drina threatens the complete destruction of almost 30 kilometers of the stream, and poses a threat to the health of the citizens of Foca and its surroundings.

"Not only have the Tara and Drina been popular for rafting and kayaking for many years, they are the true pearls of the Balkans with their beauty. Consequently, the need to preserve rivers for future generations, precisely in the pristine form given to us, must not be brought to question," Bjelic said.

Natasa Kovacevic from the Green Home organization from Montenegro points out that Elektroprivreda Republike Srpske claims without any evidence that the construction of the Buk Bijela hydroelectric power plant will not have a cross-border impact.

"In fact, if the accumulation reaches 434 meters above sea level, it would not only disrupt the migration of endangered young and other species, but would actually enter the territory of Montenegro, because the limit is 432.37 meters," explains Natasa Kovacevic.

The Center for the Environment states that the company owned by Elektroprivreda RS (49 percent) and Elektroprivreda Srbije (51 percent) is planning a series of three hydroelectric power plants on the upper Drina: HPP Buk Bijela, HPP Foca and HPP Paunci, with a total capacity of about 180 megawatts. In July 2017, a memorandum on the construction of HPP Buk Bijela was signed with the Chinese National Aero-Technological International Engineering Corporation (AVIC-ENG), but no final construction contract was signed.

"The construction permit is currently provided only for preparatory works. Apart from the fact that no loan agreement has been signed, so the source of financing remains unknown, a feasibility study has never been published, which raises the question of whether it exists at all," Center for the Environment said.

They emphasize that despite the fact that the Drina is part of the border of Bosnia and Herzegovina with Montenegro and Serbia, no BiH state institutions have so far submitted a request for approval for the construction of this hydroelectric power plant, while the BiH Attorney's Office is still investigating the case.

"In December 2020, 24 members of the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliament

initiated proceedings before the Constitutional Court against the RS decision to grant a concession for the construction of hydropower plants on the Upper Drina, as decisions regarding state property such as rivers at international borders can. A case is pending before the Committee for the Implementation of the Espoo Convention over BiH's failure to consult with Montenegro on the transboundary environmental impacts of hydropower plants on the Upper Drina. A group of NGOs filed a complaint with the Committee in May 2020, which was followed by the Montenegrin government in December of the same year, "the statement said.

It is added that the procedure initiated by the Aarhus Center in Sarajevo is underway in the Supreme Court of RS, requesting to challenge the decision of the Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and Ecology of RS from 2019, which enabled ERS to rely on impact assessment to an environment that dates back ten years and contains many shortcomings, instead of requiring a new study based on the ERS's request for a new environmental permit.

Source: radiosarajevo.ba