

The extended deadline to provide comments on the draft Principles for Sustainable Hydropower in the Western Balkans and on the draft Indicative List of Projects associated with the Regional Strategy for Sustainable Hydropower in the Western Balkans, an EU-funded study, expires on August 31.

The draft list contains the existing and potential greenfield hydropower projects that may receive financial assistance from the EU and technical assistance from the Western Balkans Investment Framework. The existing hydropower plants on the draft list include Serbia's 1,206 MW Đerdap 1, Albania's 250 MW Vau i Dejes, Bosnia and Herzegovina's 10.1 MW Una Kostela, Macedonia's 116 MW Tikveš, and Kosovo*'s 35 MW Ujmani.

The potential greenfield projects listed include Albania's Drin and Mat river cascades, Montenegro's Morača cascade, BiH's Upper Neretva and Upper Drina cascades, and Macedonia's Tenovo project.

Following the comments and suggestions received from various stakeholders, the European Commission extended the consultation period over the summer, the WBIF recalled.

The objective is to have these documents endorsed at an Energy and Environment Ministerial meeting, to take place by the end of the year. Any further comments can be emailed to the WBIF at hydropower@wbif-ipf7.eu.

The goal of balancing the future role of hydropower in the region's energy choices – building up a low-carbon generation capacity and using indigenous resources which can reduce external energy dependency – with the need to develop hydropower in a much more sustainable fashion than in the past constitutes the essence of the Regional Strategy for Sustainable Hydropower in the Western Balkans, according to the WBIF's website.

Role of small hydropower plants under question mark

The Western Balkans region has a strong tradition of hydropower development and hydropower already contributes to 49% of the electricity production of the Western Balkan 6 – with variations between Albania already producing almost 100% of its power from hydro, and Kosovo* where hydropower contributes a mere 2.2%. However, with 90% of the region's capacity constructed before 1990, of which about 10% before 1955, infrastructures are aging and at risk after years of under-investment.

The 50 largest hydro power plants in the region represent approximately 95% of the installed hydropower capacity, and rehabilitating existing hydropower infrastructure is the first, immediate priority for investments. The other 200 small hydro power plants generate the remaining 5%, which raises the question of the role of small hydro power plants and their contribution to the global energy production balanced with their multiple impacts on the environment, according to the European Commission's conclusions from technical

Two more weeks left for comments on EU-backed principles, list of sustainable hydropower projects in Western Balkans

workshops held in the region in 2017.

Some areas are of particular high value, and vulnerability, in terms of nature and biodiversity, and not all impacts of hydropower development can be mitigated in such areas. This opens the question whether to designate exclusion zones for hydropower development and the extension of the Natura 2000 network in the Western Balkans region, according to the conclusions.

Source: balkangreenenergynews