Euronatur

Crucial weeks for the Vjosa

“The future of the Vjosa is at the crossroads. Developments in recent months have given us reason for hope, BUT…” says Besjana Guri of the Albanian EuroNatur partner organization EcoAlbania, taking a deep breath “things are happening behind the scenes that worry us a lot.” All indications are that Prime Minister Edi Rama is actively paving the way for the destruction of the Vjosa, even though he recently claimed otherwise (see box).

We need to intensify the political pressure to the maximum now, so that these plans will not be implemented. For this we need your support!

Disturbing news

In September 2020, we rejoiced together: the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama announced to the media that the Vjosa River is already a national Park in the upper part and that the government is working to integrate the lower part into the park as well. A little later, however, a non-transparent process started. It all looks as if the upper stretches of Europe’s last great wild river will become a landscape protected conservation area – but nothing more than that. This is bad: For one thing, the middle course, which makes the Vjosa so unique, would not be included. For another, a landscape protected area is a very weak protection category that does not remotely do justice to the ecological value of the Vjosa. The government has still to open to the construction of hydroelectric power plants, including the Kalivaç project with its approximately 50-meter-high dam. Although Environmental Minister Blendi Klosi rejected the environmental impact survey for this project in September, the concession for it still exists.

Together for a Vjosa National Park

If the government continues on this course, it will become tight for the Vjosa. It could even happen that we have to file a lawsuit against the Kalivaç project, and that will be a long and exhausting story,” Besjana Guri from our Albanian partner organization EcoAlbania knows from experience. She has been fighting for a free-flowing Vjosa for seven years now. The back and forth between hope and fear, joy and frustration is her constant companion. All the more the support of people like you means to her!

There are moments when you feel you don’t have the strength to go on - one obstacle seems to follow the next. But the work of the past years has borne fruit: there are our international partners, the many scientists who raise their voices for the Vjosa, the lawyers who fight for them in court and all the other people from civil society who support our campaign. These people always help us to gain new strength, courage and new hope,” Besjana describes.

A recent opinion poll shows: The Albanian population also wants a free-flowing Vjosa with 94 percent in favour of the national park idea!

National park could be a reality by 2023

Albania will hold elections on April 25, 2021. This is an opportunity for the Vjosa! Together with our partners, we are making sure it happens, that the Vjosa becomes an election issue and is on everyone’s lips. Voters should know which parties, which leading politicians support the Vjosa National Park.

With political will and international support, Europe’s first wild river national park could be inaugurated as early as 2023. It would not only protect the Vjosa River, but also provide a huge opportunity for ecologically sound regional development. „We are so close to the goal. It would be sad if all our efforts were in vain. I cannot and will not imagine that the Vjosa will be dammed. It is so unique. We must continue to be strong and persistent!“

Videos of the Vjosa can be found at: balkanrivers.net/en/content/videos
A success for democracy in Albania

The case of the Poçem hydroelectric power project in the middle reaches of the Vjosa is the best example of how perseverance pays off. When we started a court case against the project together with the local residents, we had little hope of winning it. But things turned out differently: in May 2017, the Albanian administrative court finally stopped the project. The “Vjosa case” was also the first court case on an environmental project in Albania.

Admittedly, the Albanian government has filed an appeal against the ruling and we have not yet attained our goal. But a lot has been set in motion: „We have become an inspiration and a role model for other NGOs in Albania,” describes Besjana Guri. The Vjosa National Park would be a great success for democracy in our country. The general opinion here is that the government does not care and civil society is powerless. If the Vjosa would be put under protection after such a long struggle, it would be the proof of the opposite.

In the coming months we need your financial support, because we need to:

• carry out high-profile actions. We want to make the protection of the Vjosa an election campaign issue in Albania (including on national television).

• Work out a detailed roadmap on how to make the Vjosa National Park a reality. We will use this to persuade the key players. We will show the great opportunities that the national park holds for Albania.

• With the help of our environmental lawyers, we will take legal action against illegal hydroelectric power projects in the catchment area of the Vjosa, such as those on the valuable Shushica and Bënça rivers.

“ I would like to thank all our supporters! Especially those who have been there and believed in us from the beginning. We will have the chance to experience together the great feeling when the Vjosa becomes National Park!”

Besjana Guri, EcoAlbania

“ If the national park comes, the Vjosa valley will have a colorful and very vivid face. If not, it will look damned sad.”

Besjana Guri

Your donation is important!

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Vjosa in danger
Dirty tricks behind the scenes