

SURVEY

on biodiversity v. energy and extractive projects



Name of territory: **Kosovo (UNMIK)**

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- 1. Is there a conflict between biodiversity conservation and energy and extractive industries in your country? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples of investments that demonstrate this conflict.**

There is an ongoing conflict between biodiversity conservation and extractive industries in Kosovo, as economic activities were and are still unfortunately considered more priority than the environment. The lack of budget that goes directly to investments into the environment, the lack of enforcement of bans and fines, and state toleration of extractive industries due to social conditions of the population led to a difficult environmental situation on the ground. Thus, we can cluster this conflict in two large components: Energy activities and Extractive activities.

- **Energy activities**

Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK) - This is a large energy/extractive industry that uses strip mining techniques to extract lignite for two large thermo-electric power plants. These are located in the centre of the country whereby large areas of land are affected by the extraction directly, as well as from the creation of a hydraulic ash disposal site, with the infamous blue lake. It has a PH value of 12 where a lot of wildlife, particularly migrating birds, succumb by drinking its toxic water and being attracted by the lake. Hard hit by this extractive industry is as well the local fauna that has been decimated by the large intervention and alienation of a very large area of the landscape. For more the surface water around it and downstream has been poisoned by phenols and run-off chemicals from these two large industrial plants. The nearby river Sitnica, before the power plants were built, was amongst the richest water bodies in terms of biodiversity and fish types, while now it is considered a dead river and extremely polluted. Run off from the artificial lake into this river has been documented and presented in KSDW (Kosovo Sustainable Development Week event), by local environmentalists, though officials from the KEK - have denied this allegation. For more fly ash is poisoning the air and the land surface all around the surroundings. There is noise emitted from the extraction process, not all of the open pit mine has been sealed off, and access to it by wildlife is possible.

Small Hydropower development - This has been a very concerning situation with damaging influence on the local biodiversity. For as this energy activity developed, incited by feed in tariffs a lot of environmental problems were created, entire habitats disrupted and altered, erosion and deforestation, water ways changed, and riverbeds dried and put into tubes, whereby

the local biodiversity has been hit hard. As a result of these energy projects, besides destroyed landscapes, dried out rivers, also local communities have been hit hard, damaging their drinking water, destroying grazing grounds, damaging their livelihoods, that also thanks to organizing and inviting CSO's to their cause, are fighting against these developments with success and some damage could be reverted and the majority of new projects annulled. So no more small hydroelectric projects are practically possible in Kosovo anymore due to public pressure and these projects having proven more damaging to the environment rather than bringing any benefit, be it even for the energy situation where its impact has been proven to be miniscule.

- **Extractive activities**

Mining/Stone quarries - In the past two decades, the need for the building of infrastructure, roads and highways, construction of new buildings and sand created the need for a lot of aggregate material. This led to the creation of hundreds of stone quarries across the country as well as around riverbeds. This has created terrible erosion, destruction of habitats and noise and receding of fauna to higher altitudes, further away from valleys and resulted in large scale air pollution as well.

Agriculture - Is particularly damaging to habitats, especially for those in the lower altitudes, such as fields and in valleys and closer to middle altitudes. Due to the overuse of pesticides and fertilizers, aquatic life forms have been hit hard, particularly fish life, and insects, including bees have been negatively affected. In higher altitudes due to the emigration into cities the effect of agriculture has been smaller. In the western part of Kosovo, in the Dukagjini area, which has a very suitable agricultural land, due to fragmentation of land parcels, and small-scale farming, biodiversity has been to a lesser degree affected, compared to the Kosovo field, which is heavily populated, industry is relatively developed, and agricultural forms of land development are much more intense. The lack of fruit orchards and relatively intense use of the land for annual crops have ensured that this field from a biodiversity point of view to be extremely poor.

Forestry/Illegal logging & hunting - With nearly half of the country covered under forest cover, roughly half of the forests being state-owned and half of them being in private possession means that more than half of the forests being heavily damaged due to illegal logging due to low law enforcement, as the state forests are poorly protected and poorly managed due to lack of funds. It is estimated that around one forest ranger is responsible for safeguarding three thousand hectares of forest. The majority of the people in Kosovo rely upon the use of firewood for heating purposes during the winter period and this creates a lot of demand for firewood, which stresses the forests to their maximum. This in turn has created a lucrative market for firewood to the peril of biodiversity and the lack of proper forest management practices and the practical in-existence of forest thinning methods has left behind problems with shrub-like forests that are unsuitable for biodiversity, particularly larger fauna and mammals to thrive. Besides this a lot of plastic waste and oil residues due to illegal logging activities has created problems with plastic waste and motor oil contamination. Furthermore, hunting is widespread, (even though the trends are slightly improving) with methods that are not only illegal but outright criminal. The use of military firearms for hunting purposes is well documented. Even though it is officially prohibited the sheer amount of illegal firearms estimated at more than

200,000 illegal firearms - mostly remnants of the Yugoslav wars, have caused terrible damage to the local fauna.

Industrial waste/Illegal landfills - Due to a large extractive industry around metal extraction and refining a lot of industrial waste has been left behind as a legacy that was built during socialism when only production was of utmost importance compared to the environment. Heavy metal contamination of surface water, soil and groundwater ensued with lead levels spiking, damaging fauna and flora, destroying bird habitats. This is more the case in the Kosovo field area where the majority of the population lives. Illegal landfills are widespread in more than 2500 spots around the country in around 1500 settlements in the entire country. These are long lasting waste spots, characterized by plastic waste, which cause tremendous damage to the fauna, particularly as animals can ingest the plastic and therefore cause enormous suffering to them including death. Besides this, cattle are known to have died due to plastic ingestion as well as long lasting poisoning of the groundwater and destruction of the environment.

Water habitat destruction - The destruction of riverbeds for sand extraction has left behind terrible damage to the local environment, loss of land, and has created habitat fragmentation. Habitat fragmentation has been ensued also as a result of highway construction.

2. Is there a public attention towards the said conflicts? Is there public media coverage of the said conflicts? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples of investments that demonstrate this conflict.

This conflict has been a part of society for a long time. A large number of citizens are well aware of the situation. There is public attention as well as public media coverage. Furthermore, an investment that caught the attention of both people and media is the investment in hydropower plants with lasting damaging effects to biodiversity and vanishing of small rivers into tubes and drying of riverbeds and destruction of habitats. Unfortunately, some of the coverage has been done for the sake of reporting and to add more clicks to news agencies websites.

The most active cases and the best example is that of hydropower developments in the national park of Bjeshket e Nemura at the Decani Gorge where a lot of small hydropower plants have been created with destructive consequences on the local biodiversity and leaving behind a terrible environmental legacy.

3. Are there active civil society organizations working for the protection of biodiversity in your country? Do they implement actions against energy and extractive industry projects that are in conflict with biodiversity conservation? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples.

There are active civil society organizations that work on protecting biodiversity and implement actions against unsustainable energy and extractive industry projects in Kosovo and these include but are not limited to:

Pishtaret - Was established for the purpose of protecting culture and the environment. Its work has started in the municipality of Deçan as a result of degradations caused by hydropower plants.

ERA - ERA is an environmental NGO, and their goal is to promote and raise awareness and responsibility among young people, and the community of Kosovo. They are involved in projects that contribute to greener areas and projects contributing to clean and drinkable water among other projects.

WWF - Adria - Has the aim for all people to benefit from protected areas, to listen, support, and collaborate with local and national initiatives, organizations, media, public institutions, schools and decision makers, with whom to create and implement sustainable solutions. For them it is important to secure the further enjoyment of ecosystem services that protected areas provide, such as climate change mitigation, land stabilization, and flood mitigation, amongst others.

CNVP - Supports local communities in achieving their own development goals; by maximizing the production and service potential of forests through Sustainable Forest Management and locally controlled Natural Resource Management.

Gjethi - It is an organization which deals with awareness and care for the environment, as well as the organization of activities of mountaineering. This organization was very active against hydropower development in the Sharr mountain region, in the Lepenc river and were voicing their concern against unsustainable projects.

GAIA - Their aim is to work towards systematic change in society and they have a vision of sustainable life of humanity in peaceful coexistence with all forms of life on this planet in the near future. They act locally in Kosovo and in the Balkans as well. They organize multiple events and campaigns aiming to protect the environment and its biodiversity. They envision to restore and create new relationships not only between people but also between people and nature. They were engaged against construction of small hydropower plants in the Sharr mountains - National Park, in Brezovica and created actions against these constructions.

Group for the protection of Water and the Environment - Is an active social media group, with a very large number of participants in the group that are active in protection of the environment and biodiversity. This is a non - formally registered group with a lot of influence in the public and has an influence on decision makers as well.

- 4. What would these active NGOs need in order to improve their work against energy and extractive industry projects that are in conflict with biodiversity conservation? What kind of support (e.g., funding, networking, training, joint actions, joint legal cases, scientific support in analysing environmental assessment reports, etc.) would these NGOs require for their work?**

Access to information - Better access to information is important in order for the CSO's to analyse the available data and create proper actions and therefore knowing how to do the reporting of the situation and to address it to the decision makers.

Financial support - Is extremely important in order to offer the support for the work these organizations do in order to achieve their long-term sustainability. Unfortunately, most organizations are small, have limited funds available, are dependent on foreign donors. Limited financial resources mean they have limited resources available to influence the public and

decisionmakers. Local funding is miniscule, particularly from the funds available from the government. There is minimal support from the business sector to the NGO sector.

Education - Kosovo does not produce enough human capital for the specialized field of biodiversity and its development, there are no specialized directions for biodiversity protection at the public university. People are scarce in the field, those that are formed as cadres are unfortunately emigrating abroad, particularly to Germany and other countries. The lack of internal resources means that the empowerment of the sector is limited.

Capacity development - This is an important element for supporting NGOs in order to enhance well developed and effective human resources. Furthermore, developing their capacities will help to increase their social impact and align with their missions and core goals.

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