

SURVEY

on biodiversity v. energy and extractive projects



Name of country: **North Macedonia**

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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.**

Mavrovo National Park is one of the last areas where reproduction of the critical endangered Balkan lynx has been proven. Constructing hydropower plants and the associated infrastructure would destroy one of its last habitats. The Balkan lynx is a subspecies of the Eurasian lynx and is considered critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Apart from that, Mavrovo National Park harbours far more than one thousand animal and about 1500 plant species and is one of the biodiversity hotspots in Europe.

The hydro power plant Boškov Bridge (Boškov Most in Macedonian) is planned to be a typical derivation plant constructed on the river Little River (Mala Reka in Macedonian) located in the Western areas of Macedonia, near the town of Debar and the highway Skopje-Debar-Ohrid. The waters of the river Little River will be intaken at its inflows in the river Radika 10 km upstream from its inflow into the river Crn Drim. Planned construction includes a 33 m high dam and an accumulation lake of 858 x 103 m³, which would store enough water for several days from local tributaries of the Little River. HPP Boškov Bridge will have an installed capacity of 70 MW and will produce about 126 GWh per year. The project is sponsored by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

More than 80% of the HPP construction site falls within the territory of the Mavrovo National Park, the oldest, largest, and most valuable protected area in Macedonia. NP Mavrovo is the last remaining untouched beech forest in the Balkans and home to the only remaining population of the endangered species of the Balkan lynx (*Lynx ssp. Balcanicus*) (only 30-50 individuals, according to the Macedonian Ecological Society). A group of Macedonian CSOs including Eko-svest - Bankwatch member group, Front 21/42, the Macedonian Ecological Society, and two environmental coalitions "Ecology – priority" and "Natura 2000" which together gather 20 environmental organisations, have been for years advocating for the protection of Mavrovo according to the IUCN guidelines, suggesting that construction of the HPP in the National Park area is contrary to European legislation, Natura 2000 and the Water Directive Framework.

CSOs have communicated their concerns about the project's impacts on the critical habitat of the Balkan lynx to the project sponsor EBRD. The group organised protests, public hearing and petitions against the project and collected 60 000 signatures against it.

In May 2014, Macedonian activists, with help of Bankwatch, organised a symbolic protest at the EBRD Annual General Meetings in Warsaw.

CSOs pointed out the procedural loophole of the HPP Boškov Bridge that allowed the bank's board to first approve the projects and then carry out studies on the project's social and environmental impact. The activists have emphasized that The Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) study from July 2011, prepared by the Macedonian company GEING, does not provide sufficient data on the analysis of impacts of the project on mammal and bird species, for example it does not mention the impact on the Balkan lynx at all. The ESIA has not yet been approved by the Ministry of Environment. The internal body of the EBRD, verifying such complaints, found that the bank had indeed breached its own standards by approving the loan for the HPP Boškov Bridge.

In December 2015, the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats sent a reply to the complaint filed by the CSOs in early 2013. The committee asked the Macedonian Government to "suspend the implementation of the hydro-power plants foreseen within the territory of the Mavrovo National Park," and EBRD to suspend financing for the project. Such recommendations were based on a report prepared by independent experts and observers.

Following detailed consultations with the Macedonian electricity generation utility ELEM and relevant authorities in North Macedonia, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is fully accepting the recommendations of the Bern Convention Standing Committee relating to the Mavrovo National Park in Macedonia.

- 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.**

About the campaign [Europe": The](http://www.balkanrivers.net/) hydropower dams in Mavrovo National Park constitute only one wave of a true dam tsunami that is putting Balkan Rivers at risk. About 2700 new dams are currently projected between Slovenia and Albania. In order to counteract this spate of destruction, 'EuroNatur' and 'RiverWatch' have launched the "Save the Blue Heart of Europe" campaign in cooperation with local partner in the respective Balkan counties. Find out more here: <http://www.balkanrivers.net/>

- 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.**

Group of Macedonian CSOs including Eko-svest - Bankwatch member group, Front 21/42, the Macedonian Ecological Society working for the protection of biodiversity, and they implement actions against energy.

CSOs have communicated their concerns about the project's impacts on the critical habitat of the Balkan lynx to the project sponsor EBRD. The group organised protests, public hearing and petitions against the project and collected 60 000 signatures against it.

In May 2014, Macedonian activists, with help of Bankwatch, organised a symbolic protest at the EBRD Annual General Meetings in Warsaw.

- 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?**

If it is possible support is needed for joint legal cases and international experience on scientific support in analysing environmental assessment especial appropriate assessment regarding annex 6 from habitat directive

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