



## Balkan Rivers News

**Dear Friends of the Balkan Rivers,**

It has turned cold since our last newsletter, but rivers don't hibernate – so neither do we. Just recently, we published a study which underlines the extent of the dam tsunami in the Balkans. Read about this study and about other news from the Blue Heart of Europe in this newsletter.

**The Blue Heart Team wishes you a Happy New Year!**

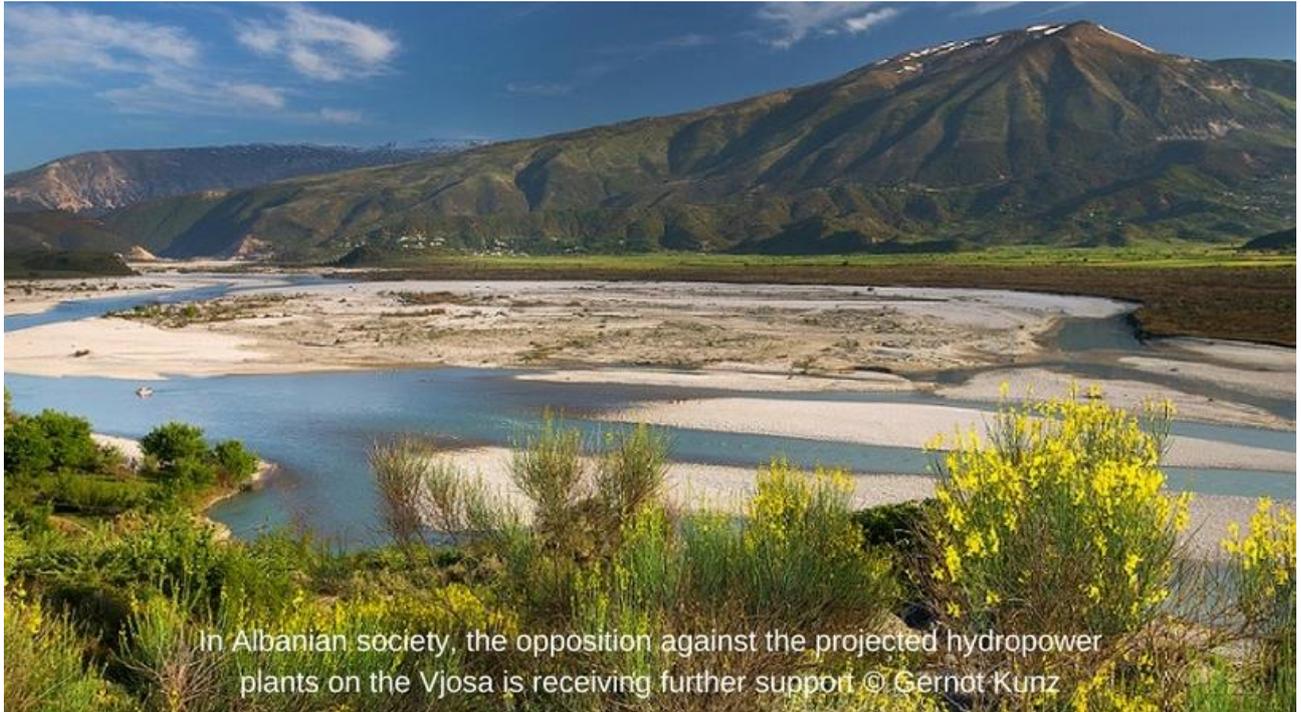


Construction site in Valbona National Park, Albania. © Mirjan Aliaj

**New report confirms hydropower tsunami in the Balkans!** A new data set makes the extent of the threat to the Blue Heart of Europe visible: 2,800 hydropower plants are being projected between Slovenia and Greece, 187 are under construction, more than 1,000 (or 37%) are located inside protected areas. Since 2015, about 160 to 180 hydropower plants have been constructed in that region. [MORE](#)

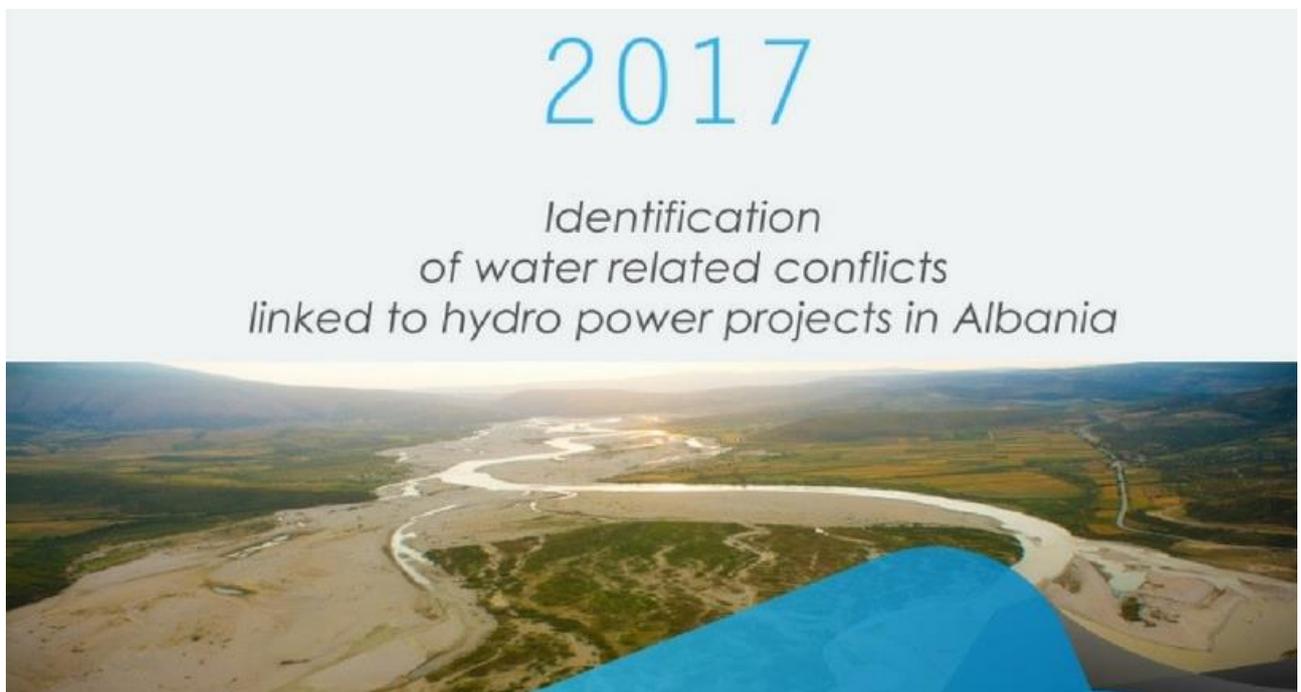
**Read the exclusive report in The Guardian:** [Balkan hydropower projects soar by 300% putting wildlife at risk, research shows](#)

## VJOSA, ALBANIA



In Albanian society, the opposition against the projected hydropower plants on the Vjosa is receiving further support © Gernot Kunz

**Albanian industrial confederation advocates for free Vjosa!** In an open letter, the “Konfindustria“ calls upon the Albanian government to stop the dam plans on the Vjosa river and to conduct environmental impact assessments according to EU standards. Will Prime Minister Edi Rama listen to the voice of Albania's 280 major industrial firms? [MORE](#)



**Hydropower conflicts in Albania: 34 people arrested, 6 casualties.** A study investigating hydropower conflicts in Albania between 2012 and 2016 reveals alarming circumstances: in these four years, 34 people have been arrested; six casualties are recorded, including one murder and one murder attempt. The study confirms that conflicts, corruption, lack of transparency and even murder are deeply connected with hydropower development in Albania. [MORE](#)



**Concession for HPP Kalivaç newly awarded.** In late October, the Albanian Minister for Energy announced that the Kalivaç dam on the Vjosa is to be constructed by the Turkish company Ayen Enerji. It is the same company which already failed the Poçem HPP. We will exhaust every legal possibility to stop this project. [MORE](#)



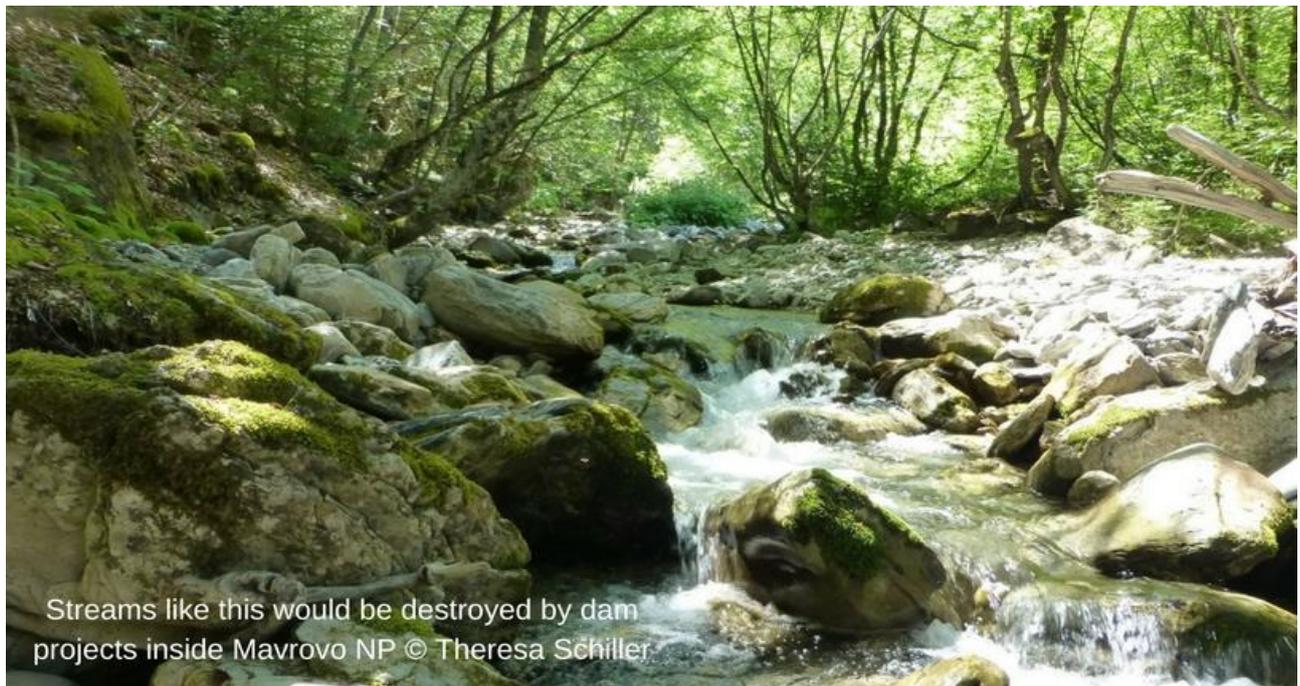
Under the slogan “**Mos ma prek Vjosën!**” (Hands off Vjosa!), a special kind of concert took place at the main square in Tirana in mid-October. In front of over 4,000 people, prominent Albanian musicians sang for the protection of the Vjosa river and against the planned dam projects. Read our [press release](#) and check out the [photos](#) and [videos](#) of the event!



New discovery: this fish species previously entirely unknown to science was discovered in the area of the projected hydropower plant Poçem. © Wolfram Graf

**Two new animal species discovered in the area of projected dam on Vjosa!** In only one week of research, an international research team found 300 animal species at the Vjosa, including a fish and stonefly species previously unknown to science. Another 40 species have been recorded for the first time in Albania. Assessments confirm that electricity generation could come to a standstill within 25 years as sediments backfill the reservoir. [MORE](#)  
The multi-media story about the science week in the German magazine **Der Spiegel** is now also available in English: [Europe's Last Blue Wonder](#)

## MAVROVO NATIONAL PARK, MACEDONIA



Streams like this would be destroyed by dam projects inside Mavrovo NP © Theresa Schiller

**Bern Convention: Hands off Mavrovo!** At its 37<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention has once again raised concerns about the still pending plans of hydropower projects inside Mavrovo National Park in Macedonia. The Committee calls upon the government in Skopje to suspend the 17 HPPs according to its 2015 recommendation. [MORE](#)



Protest activity in Skopje for the protection of the Mavrovo NP © Eko-svest

**Save Mavrovo National Park!** As Mavrovo is still threatened by several small hydropower plants, the Blue Heart Team Macedonia (Front 21/42 and Eco-svest), supported by artists and nature lovers, organized a protest in Skopje last October. A letter demanding the suspension of all HPPs inside the park and compliance with the recommendations of the Bern Convention was publicly handed over to the Macedonian Prime Minister. [MORE](#)

## RIVERS IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA



The projected HPP on Vrbas would put the critically endangered Huchen further at risk.  
© Center for Environment

**NO to hydropower plants on Vrbas!** The Vrbas is one of the last remaining rivers providing habitat to the critically endangered 'tiger of rivers' – the Huchen. The construction of further HPPs on the river would put this species even more at risk as well as endangering the water supply for the residents of Banjaluka. Our Blue Heart partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Center for Environment – are fighting projects, which would destroy the Vrbas once and for all. [MORE](#)

GENERAL



**Save the Date: Connecting Fish, Rivers and People!** The [World Fish Migration Day](#) (WFMD) is an annual global-local event to create awareness for the importance of open rivers and migratory fish. The next World Fish Migration Day is on April 21, 2018. Will you participate ? [Register your event!](#) Also find the [video](#) and [brochure](#).



The Rapuni dam causes 4.5 km of downstream riverbed to dry up. © Pippa Gallop

**EBRD confirms negative impacts of Albanian hydropower plants on people and the environment.** This Bankwatch post addresses the connection of climate change induced droughts and a drop in hydropower production. The EBRD is only realizing this now – a little too late. Hopefully, the bank will learn from its own findings and in future invest in solar instead. [MORE](#)



Fish massacre resulting from hydropower. © Klein

**European Court of Justice decides: operators of hydropower plants are liable for environmental damage!** This is also the case for plants constructed before 2007. Thus, operators can no longer argue that environmental damages were covered by earlier national operating licences. [Here the court ruling](#)

## PETITIONS



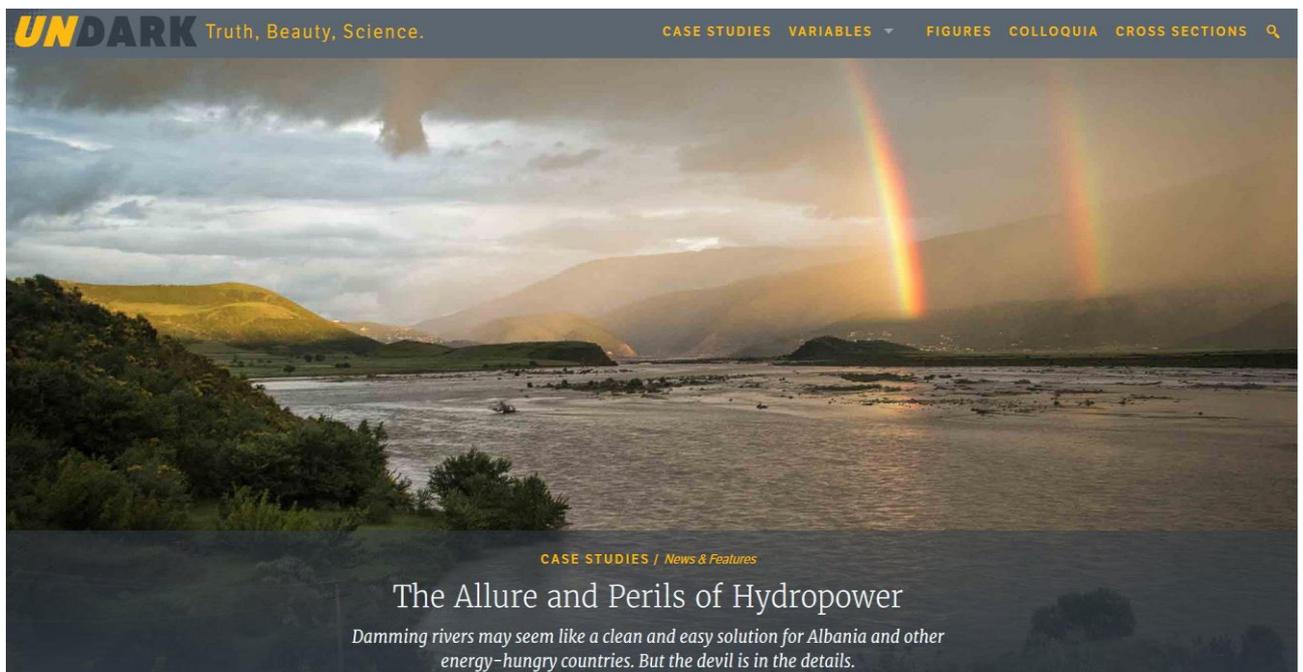
The source of the Cetina river © Courtesy of the Ne daj se, Cetino! - Spasimo Peruća i Cetinu od termoelektrane! Facebook group

Petition: Save the Cetina River, Croatia! The Cetina is under threat from a gas-fired thermal power plant, which is to be constructed on the Peruća Lake. It would destroy biosystems of the river and lake, and deprive 500,000 residents of their drinking water. [Please sign this petition!](#)



Petition: Save the Mura – Stop the dams! One of the ecologically most important habitats in Europe is facing destruction. Slovenia plans to build a chain of eight hydropower dams in the future five-country Biosphere Reserve "Mura-Drava-Danube", the so-called "Amazon of Europe". The decision on the construction of the first dam is imminent. [Please sign this petition!](#)

## BALKAN RIVERS IN MEDIA



**UNDARK: The Allure and Perils of Hydropower.** [This article](#) debunks many myths around hydropower and explores why some highly developed country have started efforts to take down hydroelectric dams, while countries like Albania insist on repeating the mistakes that are now costing fortunes to rectify. It also prominently features the Vjosa and efforts to save it.



**Video: 48 HOURS IN BOSNIA!** In September, Patagonia took a group of so-called “Change Makers” to the Balkan to explore the stunning rivers, learn about the threats they are facing and what we do to save them. [This video](#), produced by Grégory Mignard of the “Captain Yvon Association”, is the first outcome of this trip.

**All the best,  
Your Blue Heart Team**