

Open Letter: We need a Vjosa National Park now

To:

Prime Minister Edi Rama

Minister of Tourism and Environment Blendi Klosi

President Ilir Meta

President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen

EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fishery Virginijus Sinkevičius

EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi

Dear Excellencies,

The Vjosa river in Albania is one of Europe's last big wild rivers and one of the continent's most outstanding ecosystems. In light of the immense deterioration of natural habitats and biodiversity in Europe and globally, the living Vjosa is a great gift not only to the Albanian people, but also to all Europeans and beyond.

We understand that the entire Vjosa river system is at risk of hydropower development. More than 30 new dams are planned on the main river channel and on its tributaries.

Therefore, we, the undersigned **Awardees of the Right Livelihood Award (also known as Alternative Nobel Prize)**, support the people and groups who are working for the protection of this river system, including hundreds of scientists from Albania and around the world, NGOs, local communities, politicians, artists and more.

We strongly support the idea to establish a Vjosa National Park along the whole river and its tributaries – from the border with Greece to the Adriatic Sea – creating Europe's 1st Wild River National Park. This would be a huge achievement for Europe's nature and might even serve as a role model for the EU Biodiversity Strategy within the framework of the Green Deal.

At the same time, this national park would attract people from all over the world who want to see a living river with its vast gravel banks, dynamic river channels, sandy islands, canyons, delta beaches and more. We are convinced that this national park would not only save this unique ecosystem in the best possible way, but also could provide sustainable income to the Albanian communities along the rivers and streams.

Moreover, since the Vjosa originates in Greece (where it is called Aaos), there is a great vision of expanding the park into a bi-lateral national park in the future, covering the river system from the Pindus mountains to the Adriatic Sea.

Therefore, we call on

- the Albanian political leaders, to initiate the necessary steps to plan and designate the Vjosa National Park on the full length of the river in Albania including its tributaries, according to IUCN standards.

- the European Union and its member states to support Albania in its aim to establish Europe's 1st Wild River National Park, both with funds and expertise.

Respectfully,

Prof. em. Dr. Michael Succow (Right Livelihood Award 1997)

Angie Zelter for Trident Ploughshares, UK, Right Livelihood Award 2001

András Biró, Hungary, Right Livelihood Award 1995

Raúl Montenegro, Argentina, Right Livelihood Award 2004

Bianca Jagger, Nicaragua, Right Livelihood Award 2004

Anwar Fazal, Malaysia, Right Livelihood Award 1982

Maude Barlow, Canada, Right Livelihood Award 2005

Tony Rinaudo, Australia, Right Livelihood Award 2018

Martin von Hildebrand for Consolidation of the Amazon Region (COAMA), Colombia, Right Livelihood Award 1999

Jean Bellini for Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT), Brazil, Right Livelihood Award 1991

