



... a campaign to save the Balkan rivers.

Dear friends of the Balkan rivers,

Since our last newsletter, we considerably intensified our fight for the creation of a **Vjosa National Park** and received overwhelming prominent support – from EU institutions to Hollywood celebrities. The new **short film “Vjosa Forever”**, produced by Patagonia, and a visual action that we organized in four European capital cities helped to bring the issue on an international stage. Despite all the support, the Albanian government seems determined to avoid the establishment of a Vjosa National Park and create a nature park, instead. This would provide much weaker protection, exclude all tributaries and keep the door open for future dam projects and other big infrastructure projects, such as the new airport near Vlora and tourist resorts near Vjosa’s mouth. Meanwhile, general elections are coming up on April 25 and the Vjosa has become a central issue in the election campaign. 94% of Albanians are in favour of the Vjosa National Park – will they vote for the Vjosa in this election? **Find out what YOU can do to contribute to Europe’s first Wild River National Park** in this newsletter!

Your Blue Heart team wishes you a sunny spring!



#VjosaNationalParkNow! In February, we submitted a detailed [proposal for the creation of the Vjosa National Park](#) to the Albanian government. Since then, we do everything in our power so that decision makers can’t simply sweep this proposal under the table, urging them to declare the Vjosa in Albania Europe’s first Wild River National Park. On the occasion of this year’s World Water Day, we cloaked the foreground of globally recognised monuments in Paris, Berlin, Brussels, and Tirana with the demand [“Vjosa National Park Now” in 7m fabric letters](#). We also held a press conference in the [Brussels Press Club](#) and handed over a collage of the visual action to EU Commissioner of the Environment Virginijus Sinkevičius, who then [spoke out in support](#) of the Vjosa National Park. Watch the [VIDEO](#) of the cross-European action and find [MORE PHOTOS](#)



'Vjosa Forever' – new short film! In early March, Patagonia released this short film about the queen of European rivers, calling on everyone to urge their politicians – on Albanian or EU level – to commit to a #VjosaNationalParkNow. At this historic moment, people everywhere have an obligation to speak for the Vjosa; to keep it running wild, forever. [WATCH THE FILM](#) and share!



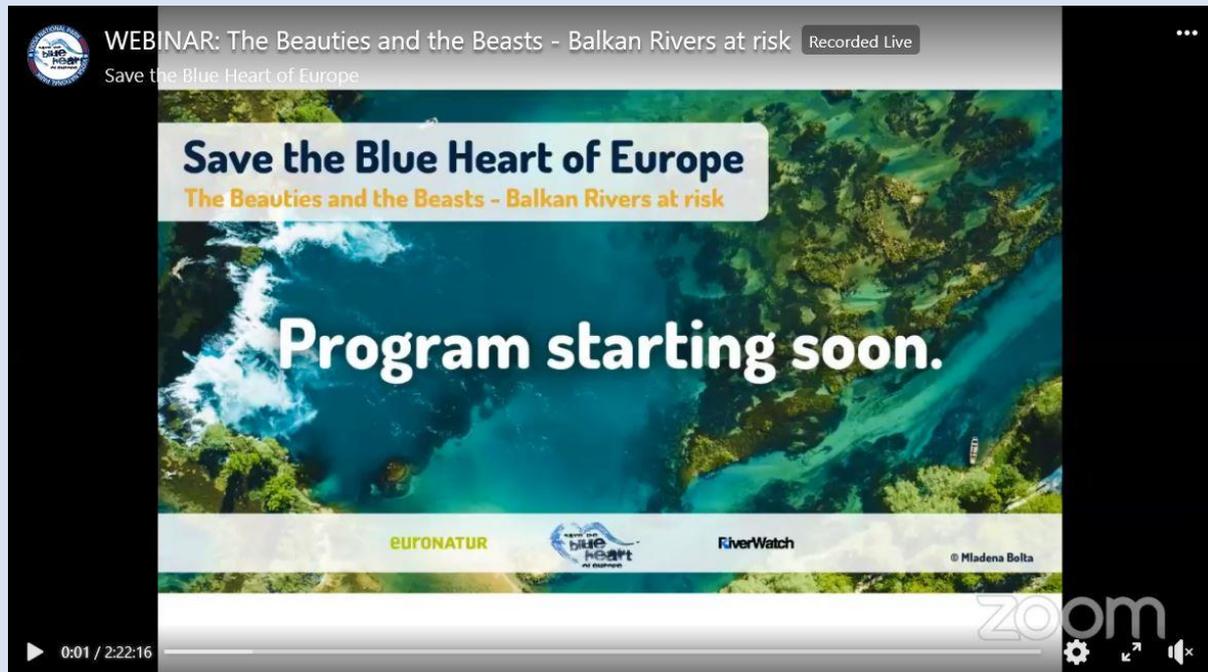
Prominent support for Vjosa! The call for Europe's first Wild River National Park has attracted the support of many influential and prominent people: Actors [Edward Norton](#) and [Leonardo DiCaprio \(2\)](#), as well as Singer-Songwriter [Ellie Goulding](#) all support the cause. [Ten awardees of the Right Livelihood Award](#) - including the renowned Prof. em. Dr. Michael Succow – wrote an open letter to the Albanian Prime Minister. Even newly elected Prime Minister of Kosovo [Albin Kurti](#) and Albanian president [Ilir Meta](#) join the call for a #VjosaNationalParkNow



EU demands Vjosa National Park in newest Progress Report on Albania! On March 25th, the European Parliament adopted the Albanian Progress Report 2021, in which the Vjosa National Park is an explicit demand. The national park, covering the whole length of the river and its tributaries, could serve as a role model for the Biodiversity Strategy within the framework of the European Green Deal. [MORE](#)



Your turn: contribute to the Vjosa National Park! Despite all this support, the Albanian government still has not committed to the creation of the Vjosa National Park. We want to show them that all of Europe and even beyond support the cause. Take a picture in your city showing your support for a [#VjosaNationalParkNow](#), [post it to your social media](#) channels and/or send it to us so we can also share it on ours! Also, use this [frame on Facebook](#) to show your support! We are looking forward to your contribution!



Video of Webinar “The Beauties and the Beasts - Balkan Rivers at risk”! On March 4th, we held our first webinar, followed live by 350 people via Zoom Webinar and Facebook live stream. Weren't able to join? No problem - [watch the recording](#)! In this webinar we explained how we try to achieve the impossible: to save the Balkan rivers from a dam tsunami of more than 3,400 hydropower projects.



Next Webinar: Legal Tools to Protect Rivers from Hydropower Development! International laws and EU environmental regulations have become valuable tools in preventing the construction of new dams. In our webinar on **Thursday, 29 April (14-16:00)**, we will be presenting our soon-to-be-released Legal Toolkit for the protection of rivers. We invite you to share your experience of legal steps taken against hydropower projects and join in a discussion with us! [REGISTER HERE](#)

Shpresa is the victim of a SLAPP case for speaking out against destructive activities of the Kelag in Kosovo. © Ulrich Eichelmann



Kelag again! The scandal about the actions of Austrian Kelag Energie in Kosovo continues: Kelag's subsidiary in Kosovo "Kelkos" sued activist Shpresa Loshaj for €100,000. This looks very much like a SLAPP case – a strategic lawsuit against public participation – which, according to European Parliament's rapporteur for Kosovo, are on the rise in the country. It is an unacceptable attempt to shut down civil society and push through highly contested hydropower projects. Shpresa won't be intimidated and we will support her all the way! [MORE](#)

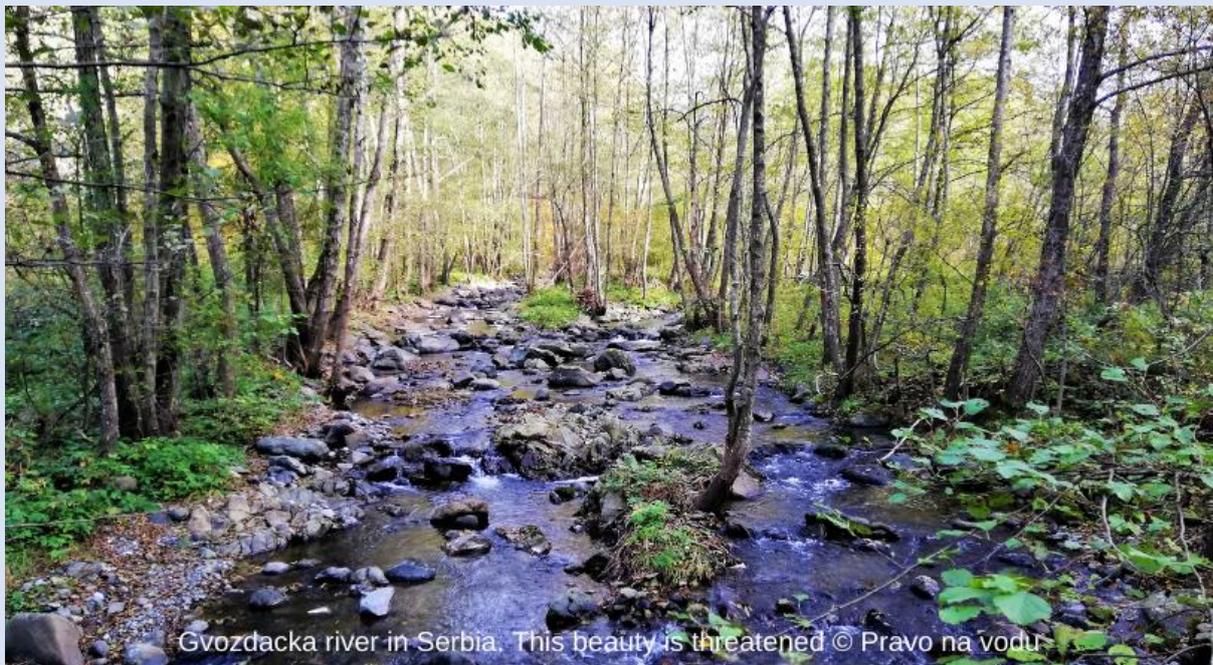


Upper Neretva, Uloški buk © Robert Oroz

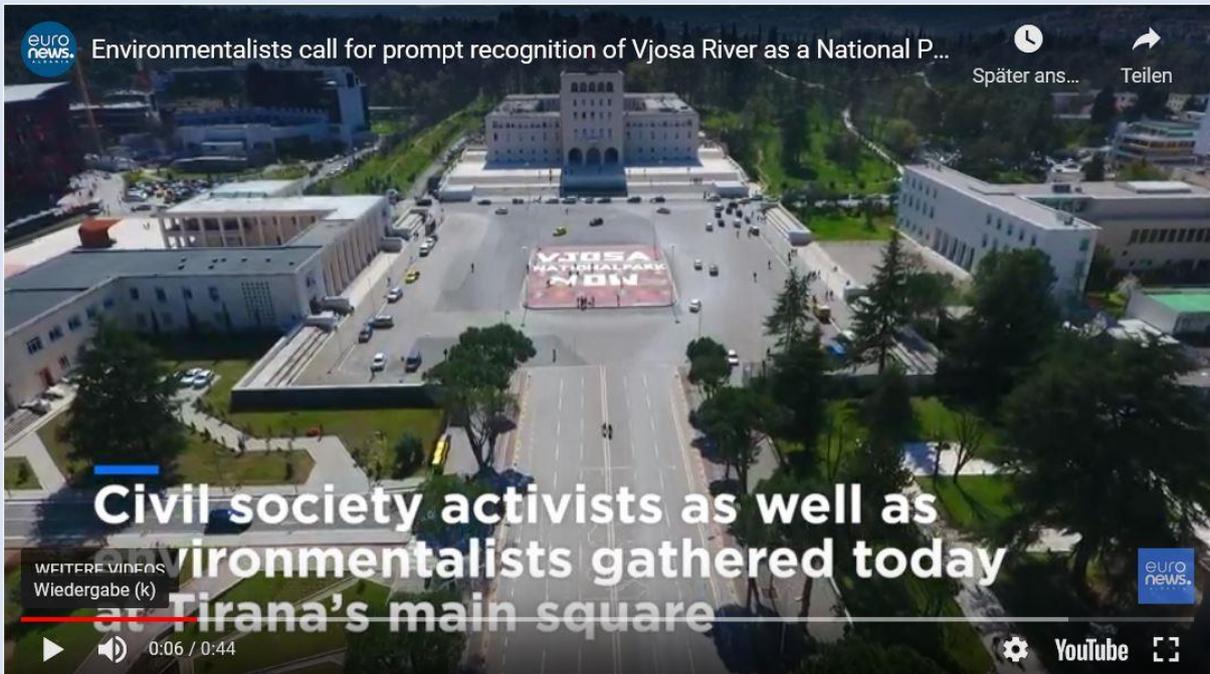
Good news from Bosnia and Herzegovina! Following the Federation of BiH, the Republika Srpska now also wants to end the hydropower boom. The Assembly in Banja Luka [adopted a declaration](#) in mid-February to 1. end subsidies of hydropower, 2. review all existing hydro concessions, 3. put a moratorium on new concessions.



Prominent Artists for Balkan Rivers! Rivers inspire arts – and artists stand up for their protection. Recently [Igor Paspalj](#), who was named Best Guitarist of the World in 2020, joined our struggle for Balkan Rivers. Furthermore, Bosnian director and supporting Artist for Balkan Rivers [Jasmila Žbanić](#) was nominated for two Oscars for her film "Quo Vadis, Aida?". Last October, she spoke up about Bosnian rivers and against their destruction in the N1 Bosna i Hercegovina interview.



Spotlight on Gvozdacka River! The Gvozdacka river is a gorgeous mountain river in the region of Kraljevo/Serbia, within the special nature reserve "Goc Gvozdac". This biodiversity hotspot hosts 715 plant species, 317 insect species, 129 bird species, 20 species of amphibians and reptiles as well as 27 species of mammals. The construction of several small HPPs is planned on the Gvozdacka River, which flows through the reserve. Local population and the manager of the protected area strongly oppose these projects. Serbian Blue Heart partner Right to Water ([Pravo na vodu](#)) is fighting to preserve all rivers in the Kraljevo region.



Balkan rivers in the media: Especially the Vjosa National Park has inspired many media articles. Here a selection: [Protect Europe's last big wild river, the Vjosa in Albania](#) (European Business Review); [Environmentalists call for prompt recognition of Vjosa River as a National Park](#) (EuroNews); [Could hydropower dams destroy Europe's last wild river?](#) (EuroNews); [Albania Urged to Save Wild River by Proclaiming National Park](#) (Balkan Insight); [Albin Kurti Calls for Vjosa River to be Protected](#) (Exit News); [A hidden treasure in the middle of Albania](#) (Travel Tomorrow); [Authentic and green tourism off the beaten tracks in Albania's Vjosa river region](#) (International Labour Organization); [Leonardo DiCaprio Against Dams on the Vjosa River](#) (Tirana Times); [Vjosa Forever film release: Future of Europe's largest unspoilt river hangs in balance](#) (Balkan Green Energy News); [Patagonia CEO joins voices in defense of Vjosa and battle against dams in Balkans](#) (Citizen Channel); ['Vjosa river national park now'](#) (Speaking of Europe); ["Vjosa forever", un court métrage de Patagonia pour préserver le plus grand fleuve d'Europe](#) (L'adn); [Republika Srpska's parliament calls for moratorium on small hydropower plants](#) (Balkan Green Energy News)

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