



Non-governmental Organisation Emancipimi Civil Ma Ndryshe
EC MA NDRYSHE

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PRESS RELEASE

“Brezovica” project threatens the destruction of rare natural values

Proceeding from the public call for reporting cases of legal violations committed by institutions, EC Ma Ndryshe received a notification of a group of citizens in relation to a project, respectively the Master Plan for Brezovicë/Brezovica. The concern raised relates to the risk that the project would harm natural values of the National Park “Sharri”.

Although EC Ma Ndryshe is engaged in monitoring the transparency of Prizren municipal executive, the gravity of this matter has led the monitoring staff to extend the usual framework of their operation by researching the case related to “Sharri” National Park, which stretches in the territory of the municipality of Prizren as well as in several other municipalities of Kosovo. The public interest on this case is high, as in the drafting of this Master Plan the Government of Kosovo and international donors are directly involved, which if implemented, this plan threatens with the destruction of rare natural values of Sharri mountains.

The research conducted for several months by EC Ma Ndryshe included collection and the review of the plan, the laws and establishing contacts with experts of the field. Based on the analysis performed so far, “Brezovica” project, although presented to the public as a development project of national interest, could easily degenerate into the devastation of natural values of the century.

“Brezovica” project foresees the realization of investments in about three thousand and five hundred hectares of the territory with significant natural assets in “Sharri” National Park, which by the decision of the Assembly of Kosovo has been declared of a national interest. This project is intended to take on in 5 areas: A, B (where the existing ski center is), C, D and E.

The main focus has been on the area A, which covers an area of 600 hectares and where the foremost natural values of Kosovo are found. In this area a great number of structure constructions are planned, such as: a village, roads, ski lifts and additional amenities, which in return cause felling and massive destruction of forest ecosystems, flora, fauna, rivers and land. Meanwhile, the MESP states that currently there’s no approved plan for the development of this zone and that all potential developments must be in line with the regulations and applicable laws.

However, according to the Draft Spatial Plan of “Sharri” National Park (2009) drafted by the MESP, in the National Park “Sharri”, respectively in the area A of “Brezovica” project, two integrated nature reserves are found: Bistra (Ujërat e Humbur; *Eng: Lost Waters*) and Përroska e Durlës (*Eng: Durla’s ravine*) where all human activities are prohibited, especially felling, deforestation and construction. Notwithstanding, in February, the GoK’s inter-ministerial committee for “Brezovica” project has sent a letter to the MESP in which the areas A, B, C, D and E, namely an area of about three thousand and five hundred hectares, be declared as third

protective area in order to create legal conditions for human interventions. This has instigated changes towards depreciation of the natural values by alteration from the first protective area into a third protective area, although such assessment was done earlier. Given the fact that the nature has not undergone any changes in this part, it actually implies that intervention is made arbitrarily, based on the need for implementation of the project.

EC Ma Ndryshe has communicated with the MESP, respectively with Mr. Kreshnik Berisha, advisor to the Minister Dardan Gashi, who confirmed the existence of the letter and that, "...according to it, the Draft Spatial Plan for "Sharri" National Park has envisaged the abovementioned area as the third protective area". He admitted that, "...in principle, the MESP and its relevant bodies have been against such zoning" by adding that, "...they have acquiesced because of the economic impact". Furthermore, Mr. Berisha explained, "Given the economic impact the project will have, and on the other side the guarantees that we have received from the inter-ministerial committee regarding the ultimate protection of the environment, it was decided to turn this zone into a development zone. All developments must be provided with relevant plans, based on the regulations in force, and which will be subject to a strict control by the entire responsible structures of the Ministry".

The assessment of the experts of this field is that "Brezovica" project must be stopped in the area A in order to ward off the destruction of nature. Tourism could be developed in the areas B, C, D and E, which means modernization of the existing touristic centre (area B) as well as the extension and the construction of new touristic capacities within areas C, D and E.

"Brezovica" project, according to the experts, contains in itself numerous legal violations and great lack of transparency. The project is in contradiction with legal provisions of the Law on Protection of Nature and the Law on Environmental Protection. Furthermore, the principles for preservation of protected species and endangered species of flora, fauna, funguses and birds, but also the habitats, are being violated. For "Brezovica" project neither Environmental Impact Assessment nor Strategic Environmental Assessment have been conducted. The project is in contradiction with the outlining of the areas under protection regime of "Sharri" National Park, according to the LNP and the UICN international conventions, but also with the funding for nature conservation. (Broader reasoning of legal violations made by experts is provided as an Annex to this Press Release).

EC Ma Ndryshe considers as unacceptable that millions of Euros from Kosovo's budget to be invested for forest conservation and new planting, while in the other hand the most valuable and best preserved true healthy forests in Kosovo; worse even – those which are under legal protection; are being destroyed in an institutional manner.

The experience so far shows that personal interests of certain groups of business and politics hide behind the construction of touristic villages in natural zones. An example for this is Prevala, which firstly was presented as a national development project with economic impact, whereas in fact it exhibits the disgrace of human action within the National Park.

EC Ma Ndryshe recommends the inter-ministerial committee, the Assembly of Kosovo and all institutions to stop with the implementation of the project in the Zone A of the National Park due to special natural values in the area.

EC Ma Ndryshe calls on the Kosovo Assembly members, who are members of the respective committees, to take the initiative for demanding clarifications from the Government of Kosovo thus the debate on this matter become part of the public discourse in order to render best decisions for the future of “Sharri” National Park.

EC Ma Ndryshe urges Kosovo institutions to invite international organizations dealing with ecological and environmental issues, as the UICN, EU, WWF and REC, to assess the potential environmental consequences of the “Brezovica” project prior to further project implementation.

EC Ma Ndryshe requests that tourism development not to be concentrated on a zone with a surface area of three thousand and five hundred hectares, but the investments to be distributed *pro rata* in other touristic zones, which are many in “Sharri” National Park.

Project of EC Ma Ndryshe for transparency oversight of the executive branch will continue on publicizing monitoring findings through regular press releases and project’s website, where the findings will be posted directly by the monitors. So far, all the monitoring findings, including regular press releases and other information relative to local government of Prizren, are regularly published on the project’s website: www.online-transparency.org.

Thank you for your cooperation,

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