



REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRISË
KUVENDI
SEKRETARI I PËRGJITHSHËM

Nr. 226 Prot.

Tiranë, më 19.01 /2022

Lënda: Dërgohet shkresa e deputetëve.

DELEGACIONIT TË BASHKIMIT EUROPIAN NË SHQIPËRI

TIRANË.

Ju dërgojmë bashkëlidhur shkresën e deputetëve të Kuvendit të Shqipërisë, znj. Jorida Tabaku dhe z. Helidon Bushati.

Duke Ju falenderuar për bashkëpunimin dhe mirëkuptimin.

SEKRETARI I PËRGJITHSHËM



Genci GJONÇAJ



REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRISË
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To: **Oliver Varhelyi**

Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations

Cc: **Virginijus Sinkevičius**

Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fishery

Luigi Soreca

Head of the Delegation of European Union in Tirana

Subject: Possible infringement of EU law in the case of the Vlora Airport

Dear Commissioner,

Through this letter, we would like to express our gratitude for the European Commission towards our concerns raised since 3 years ago regarding the construction of a commercial airport in Vlora. By September 2018 we addressed a letter stressing that this project breaches not only the domestic legislation, but also there were evidences of breach regarding, the Stabilization and Association Agreement, the EU *acquis* and the domestic legislation that approximates it as well as, in the following cases, and the Agreement on the European Common Aviation Area (ECAA).

The government submitted to the Parliament a draft law on the construction of the Vlora Airport on January 24th 2018, which was approved only with the votes of the ruling majority through the accelerated procedure; the reason for such urgency was not explained. It is also worth noting that this draft law was not scrutinized by the Committee for European Integration, which is the responsible parliamentary committee for the approximation of national legislations with the EU *acquis* and the oversight of the implementation of the commitments stemming from the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

A winner for this contract was announced at last from Minister of Infrastructure Belinda Balluku on March 2021, after several failed attempts.

In your last Country Report this was also highlighted as a main issue *"In December 2020, the National Territorial Council approved without proper public consultations the map of revised borders of the Protected Areas, where many protected areas are projected to be more fragmented and smaller in size, despite an overall total size increase."*

The construction of the airport will include protected areas in the Vjosa - Narta Lagoon. Dozens of local and international environmental organizations have raised awareness and concern that it would cause *"irreversible damage to the ecosystem of the Vjosa-Narte Protected Landscape."*

They have added that such an investment would bring uncontrolled and unsustainable development models that risk irreversibly damaging the natural value and resources of the area. The Lagoons have a distinct and valuable character in its ecological, biological, cultural, aesthetic, and other features. It is also in the Albanian Protected Area Network, as an Important Bird Area, and a Key Biodiversity Area. It almost meets the criteria to be classified as a Wetland of International Importance. The government has even nominated it as a candidate site for the Emerald Network under the Bern Convention.

Also, the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention has called on the Albanian government to declare the Vjosa River and its surroundings a national park and reassess Vlora International Airport's situation.

Albania is a signatory of the Agreement on conserving the "African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement" (AEWA), which relates to 92 species found at Narta. More than 200 other species are monitored in the area, two-thirds of which are protected under international conventions, and tens are endangered.

Protection of the environment is stipulated in the SAA agreement, which Article 92 stresses that:

"Cooperation shall aim to promote the modernization and restructuring of the Albanian industry and individual sectors, as well as industrial cooperation between economic operators, with the objective of strengthening the private sector under conditions which ensure that the environment is protected."

Also the article 86 stipulates:

"Policies and other measures shall be designed to bring about sustainable economic and social development of Albania. These policies should ensure that environmental considerations are also fully incorporated from the outset and that they are linked to the requirements of harmonious social development."

And the article 108:

"The Parties shall develop and strengthen their cooperation in the vital task of combating environmental degradation, with the aim of promoting environmental sustainability."

Taking into account the above mentioned, the area is an important section of the "Adriatic Flyway", in which hundreds of thousands of birds' forage and take shelter during the migrations season. Birds like pelicans, herons, gulls, and flamingos are big enough to put the safety of planes and people at serious risk in case of collisions.

We have started collaboration with civil society on this issue, and the Chair of the EU Integration Committee is asking for public scrutiny of this project. Under these circumstances we kindly ask you to investigate the case according to the respective procedures.

We remain at your disposal to provide additional information and clarification, if required. Thank you again for your attention and the interest shown.

Sincerely,

Jorida Tabaku

Chair of the Committee on European Integration

Helidon Bushati

Deputy Chair of the Committee on Productive Activities, Trade and Environment

