

Date: 01.11.2023

**To: The Prime Minister of Albania, Mr. Edi Rama**  
**To all other representatives of central and local institutions, Vlora and Fieri;**  
**All other interested parties in the country and abroad.**

**Subject:** *International Vjosa Delta Symposium – An Ecosystem in Transition: Open Letter*

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

Dear Mrs./Mr.,

On behalf of the University of Tirana and all other collaborators<sup>1</sup>, we inform that the ***International Vjosa Delta Symposium - An Ecosystem in Transition*** was held in Vlora, on dt. October 27-28. 45 scientists from the country and the region (Austria, Italy, Slovenia, Greece) participated in it. About 20 presentations were held in total, 13 dedicated to the Delta, geological diversity, ecological condition and biodiversity, their condition and threats. Experts from the region brought their experience on the importance of transitional ecosystems, their services, the standards that must be met for sustainable development, etc. Representatives of responsible government central and local institutions were also invited to this event to present their opinions.

The activity deals with the efforts and concern of the academia from our institutions together with national and international environmental organizations regarding the main attitude towards the Vjosa Delta area. The **Delta Symposium** in Vlora in October 2023, followed first a **Scientific Week** in Delta with experts in April 2023 to better understand the situation on site and to update the knowledge on geology, geography, biodiversity, etc., and prepare a **Special Volume** outlining the natural values and related benefits (services), and the specific sensitivity and potential threats of habitats and species (under preparation).

**Nevertheless, the area of the Vjosa Delta, is among the most important and best preserved on the whole Adriatic coast, despite the natural and human transformations in the last 60-70 years.** It is a **transitory ecosystem** with importance both from the natural aspects and for the human services it offers. It extends from the dunes and wetlands of Darzeza/Poro, Fieri, to the Narta lagoon, Vlora, formed over hundreds of years by the hydrodynamic and sedimentological activity of the Vjosa River and the Adriatic Sea. Therefore, the Delta and the National Park of the Vjosa Wild River form an inseparable hydrodynamic and ecological entity.

There are up to 18 habitats in the area, listed as Natura 2000, where 6 of them are priority habitats that need special protection. They host about 2,300 species known to date: 1350 plant species and 880 animal species, where 240 of them are birds and over 100 are fish. **A significant part are rare and threatened both nationally and internationally.** The area is

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listed as important, both for birds (IBA), and for plant species (IPA). Moreover, the Wild Vjosa River and the Delta forms an indivisible hydrodynamic and ecological entity.

On the other hand, **man's attitude towards this natural wealth has not been friendly at all for decades of modern Albania.** Let's list some: large-scale land reclamation with a dense drainage network (since the 1960s); exploitation for salt pans (since the 1960s); industrial activity in Vlora (Soda and PVC factories) (1960-1990); untreated sewage from Vlora (until 2019) and other urban centers; gas exploitation in Povelça, Fieri (until 1990); harbor activity (ongoing) and petroleum (since 2009), Vlora; uncontrolled rural urbanization mainly in the area of Vlora (after the 1990s); unfriendly fishing (since 1990), amphibian (since the 1980s), and medicinal plants harvesting; unfriendly agriculture and livestock (ongoing); sand beach exploitation (1990-2000); road construction (ongoing); frequent fires, the most recent in the Darzeza-Poro forest in September 2023; the thermal power plant of Vlora (97MW; 2010); etc. All this, even important for the economy, was done without taking proper care of environmental issues, forcing nature to hit back sooner or later, as happened with the destruction of Patoku and Semani beaches, due to construction in the wrong place and not properly.

In addition to the pressure in the past, in recent years the area of **the Delta is also under the threat of the large-scale tourism development.** Undoubtedly, these will lead to the further decrease of ecological integrity, fragmenting its habitats, leading to their loss, as well as the loss of species in the near future. The expert opinion is that the present assessment is insufficient and not properly done according to international standards, regarding the main environmental issues, the human impact, and what would be the eventual trends after the implementation of the ongoing development plans. **Moreover, even the safety of infrastructure investments is not clear within a very dynamic Delta due to galloping marine erosion, with rapid changes in its extent and contours. The forming of abandoned traces of construction within this area cannot be merely imaginary.**

We strongly suggest:

**-Facilitate for an interdisciplinary study of Vjosa Delta focused on its conservation and sustainable management, based on scientific evidence.**

**- The whole Vjosa Delta must be preserved, left untouched by large-scale tourism; instead, it should wisely be used for nature-based tourism projects.**

**-It is now the right moment that the Pishe Poro - Narta Protected Landscape to be declared National Park (IUCN category II) as an indivisible part of Vjosa Wild River National Park.**

Sincerely

**Symposium participants and more ...**

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