

Impacts of the construction works within the Pishë Poro–Nartë Protected Area

June 19th, 2026

1. Information on the Protected Area

The Vjosa-Narta wetland complex is one of the most ecologically valuable and best-preserved coastal ecosystems in the Mediterranean. Its importance lies not only in its exceptional biodiversity, but also in the remarkable mosaic of different habitats and ecosystems, with the Vjosa river at its very heart. The delta of the Vjosa river is the only protected area in Albania where different protected area categories and international conservation designations are concentrated in full harmony within a single landscape.

The Pishë Poro–Narta Protected Landscape represents a unique case in Albania, where virtually all categories of protected areas recognized under the IUCN system, from Category II to Category VI, are present in a single ecological mosaic. Although the area as a whole is classified as a Category V Protected Landscape, it is crossed by the Wild River National Park of the Vjosa (Category II), while also encompassing several Category III Natural Monuments, including the Molassic Hills of Zvërnec, the Limopou Lagoon wetlands, and the stabilized sand dunes of Narta. Furthermore, the former Pishë Poro Managed Nature Reserve retains the ecological values for which it previously held Category IV status. In September 2025, the entire Vjosa River Delta was internationally recognized as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve under the Man and the Biosphere Programme, corresponding to IUCN Category VI standards.

Beyond national protection, the area is of outstanding international significance. It is designated as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance, an Important Bird Area (IBA), a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), an Emerald Network candidate site under the Bern Convention, and a candidate Natura 2000 site under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

Ecologically, the Vjosa Delta is among the most intact river delta systems remaining in the Mediterranean basin. It serves as a crucial stopover and wintering ground along the Adriatic Flyway, one of the most important migratory routes for birds between Europe, Asia, and Africa. More than 250 bird species have been recorded here, including globally significant species such as the Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) and greater flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*). The area also provides habitat for numerous other species of conservation concern, including the loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*).

Importantly, the value of these wetlands extends beyond biodiversity. They provide essential ecosystem services, including flood regulation, carbon storage, water purification, coastal protection, and support for sustainable fisheries and nature-based tourism. Their ecological integrity therefore contributes not only to Albania's natural heritage but also to the well-being and resilience of local communities.

For these reasons, the Vjosa-Narta wetlands are not simply important at the national level, they are a site of European and global conservation significance, whose protection is essential for maintaining one of the last largely intact river-to-sea ecosystems in the Mediterranean.

2. Rapid Assessment from the site

Field activities, including fencing, the establishment of the construction camp, and the construction of access roads, began on **30 April 2026**. However, only fifteen days later, on **15 May 2026**, the competent environmental authority determined that the project must undergo a **Full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)**. This means that on-site interventions had already commenced before the state had officially determined the level of environmental assessment required for the project and before a comprehensive evaluation of its ecological acceptability had been completed. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to support the claim that the legal procedures were being followed in the sequence required by law.

The reason why the Environmental Impact Assessment is placed at the very beginning of the permitting process is precisely to document the existing environmental conditions before any intervention takes place, identify the natural values that may be affected, and assess possible alternatives. Only on this basis can it be determined whether a project should proceed, be modified, or not be authorized at all. When physical interventions precede the assessment, part of the baseline information that should inform the environmental analysis may already have been altered or degraded, thereby undermining the integrity of the assessment process itself.

Field observations conducted after the commencement of the works suggest that the preliminary interventions have already caused significant impacts on the area's natural habitats. The operation of heavy machinery along the beaches of Dajlani and Portonova is believed to have damaged the nesting habitats of the **loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*)**, a protected species that is globally threatened. The coastal sand dune systems, which constitute priority habitats under both Albanian and European Union conservation frameworks, have been affected by the deposition and compaction of construction materials used for the opening of internal access roads. Furthermore, interventions in the Portonova Channel have the potential to alter the natural water exchange processes between the lagoon and the sea, a mechanism that is essential for the ecological functioning of the entire wetland complex.

In addition, the installation of fences and other physical barriers has restricted the movement of wildlife, while the intensive activity of heavy machinery, trucks, and construction equipment has substantially increased disturbance levels for birds and other species associated with the area's habitats. These are precisely the types of impacts that a **Full Environmental Impact Assessment** is intended to identify, analyze, and evaluate **before** any works are authorized, not after construction activities have already begun.

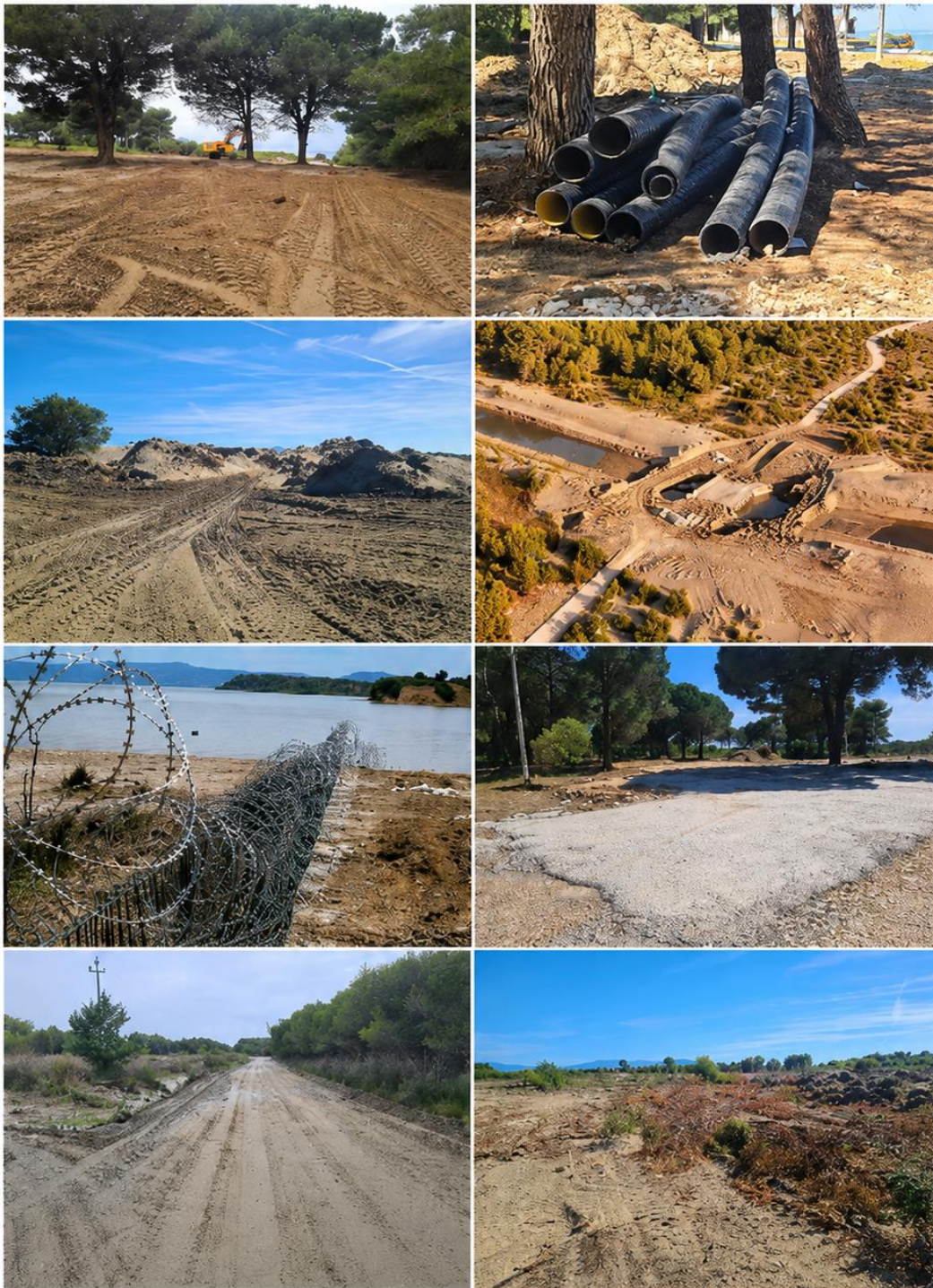


Photo 1: Evidence of preliminary works carried out within the Protected Area without environmental permit.