

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3174/01
by Ioannis Averoff (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Environmental effects of the construction of hydroelectric projects in the Epirus area

In the neighbourhoods of Vovousa on the Aoos (district of Ioannina) and Aghios Nikolaos on the Arachthos (district of Arta), the engineering companies AEGEK Energy and Engineering Ltd are planning to construct two 93 MW hydroelectric projects, and a smaller one is scheduled for construction in the Anilios area (Ronas forest). The projects all lie within the larger area of the Pindus national park (Valia Kalda), which is registered in Natura 2000, the European ecological network, and another national park currently being set up. This construction will lead to environmental degradation of the whole region, important habitats will be threatened by the diversion of the Aoos at Vovousa and cultural monuments on the Arachthos (Plaka bridge and the customs building) will be put at risk. In none of these three cases were the procedures for informing the public and taking public opinion into account complied with. In addition, local environmental organisations say that Engineering A.E. submitted an inaccurate map to the relevant authorities, showing the above monuments 1 kilometre north of their true position, to avoid the application of the licensing procedure.

Licensing of the above projects is proceeding in contravention of Council Regulation (EC) 1260/1999¹ on projects funded by the Third CSF (see Article 12 on compatibility with Community policies) as well as certain Council directives: under 85/337/EEC² as amended by 97/11/EC³, an assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment is compulsory and the opinion of the public concerned must be taken into account in the development consent procedure (Articles 6(2) and 8). Licensing also contravenes Directive 92/43/EC⁴, one fundamental aim of which is to preserve Natura 2000 areas in good condition. Article 6 of this directive stipulates that for actions likely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 areas an appropriate assessment must be made of implications on the regions' ecological value, and actions should be approved only if they do not adversely affect their integrity.

The recent European Parliament and Council Directive 2000/60/EC⁵ also includes the objective of the adoption of measures to protect water and ensure it is used in a sustainable way.

What measures does the Commission intend to take to ensure that the above legal provisions are actually applied in this specific case?

¹ OJ L 161, 26.6.1999, p. 1.

² OJ L 175, 5.7.1985, p. 40.

³ OJ L 73, 14.3.1997, p. 5.

⁴ OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

⁵ OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1.