

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002803/24
to the Commission
Sakis Arnaoutoglou (S&D)
(6 December 2024)**

Subject: Acheloos valley threatened with destruction by the proposed Avlaki hydro-power project, the eighth such project in an already overburdened river

The Avlaki hydroelectric project planned in the Acheloos Valley has been met with strong opposition from local communities and stakeholders concerned about its devastating effects on the natural environment and cultural heritage of the area. The Acheloos valley is a Natura 2000 protected area with considerable ecological importance and special biodiversity. What is more, it has been recognised as being valuable for alternative, rural and religious tourism and local residents are trying to get the valley listed as a Unesco heritage site.

The project will lead to a major environmental disaster, as the dam will flood almost the entire valley, altering the natural landscape and submerging important cultural monuments, forests, homes and arable land.

Taking into account the European directives on the protection of natural resources and aquatic ecosystems and the opposition voiced by Greece's Natural Environmental and Climate Change Agency and local regions and municipalities, can the Commission say:

1. Is it aware of the environmental impact that the project will have on a Natura 2000 protected area?
2. How will it ensure that large renewable energy projects do not harm the environment and cultural heritage in areas of natural and cultural importance?
3. What measures will it take to protect local communities that oppose projects altering the character of their region, leading to migration and desertification due to the loss of agricultural and low-impact alternative tourism activity?

Submitted: 6.12.2024

**Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(13 February 2025)**

It is the duty of the national competent authorities to assess the impacts of the mentioned project as required by EU law. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive ⁽¹⁾ requires that, before a consent is given, projects likely to have significant effects on the environment be subject to an assessment.

For installations for hydroelectric energy production ⁽²⁾, the authorities must determine whether an assessment is necessary through a case-by-case study or previously set thresholds or criteria.

Such an assessment, if required, will take into account the impacts of the projects on the environment and on cultural heritage aspects.

Under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive ⁽³⁾, if the project is likely to have a significant negative effect on a Natura 2000 site, the competent authorities must conduct an appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of its conservation objectives ⁽⁴⁾.

Where the obligation to carry out assessments arises simultaneously from the EIA Directive and the Habitats Directive, the Member State must, where appropriate, provide for coordinated and/or joint procedures.

Under the Water Framework Directive ⁽⁵⁾, Member States must ensure that activities like transfer of water doesn't result in any deterioration of the status of any body of water, and all necessary measures are taken to prevent negative impacts.

Member States have a primary responsibility to ensure that renewable energy projects are developed in full compliance with EU legislation.

⁽¹⁾ Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, OJ L 26, 28.1.2012, p. 1-21, as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014, OJ L 124, 25.4.2014, p. 1-18.

⁽²⁾ Referred to in Annex II, 3 h) of the EIA Directive.

⁽³⁾ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7-50.

⁽⁴⁾ Commission's guidance document: Guidance on the requirements for hydropower in relation to EU nature legislation, Publications Office of the European Union, 2018, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2779/43645>

⁽⁵⁾ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1-73.

The protection and conservation of cultural heritage of European significance are also primarily a national responsibility ⁽⁶⁾. In its role as guardian of the Treaties, the Commission will continue monitoring the situation and may decide to take appropriate action.

⁽⁶⁾ Articles 3 and 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.