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The European Commission must act now to ensure the rule of law in Albania

Dear Commissioners Marta Kos and Jessika Roswall,

Dear colleagues from the European Commission,

Since May 2026, hundreds of thousands of Albanian citizens have been protesting against the destruction of the [Vjosë-Narta lagoon](#), one of the most pristine coastal areas in Europe.

The Vjosë-Narta ecosystem has protected status as the “Nartë - Pishë Poro” Protected Landscape because of its exceptional ecological value. The site is also a proposed Site of Community Interest, a candidate Emerald site, an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area and a Key Biodiversity Area. The area hosts more than 34,000 wintering waterbirds and includes important habitats for flamingos, pelicans, and many migratory species. The Vjosë-Narta-Pishë-Poro natural complex hosts 18 habitats listed under Annex I of the Habitats Directive, representing around 35% of all Natura 2000 habitats potentially found in Albania. Five of these are priority habitats, concentrated mainly along the coastal area, and are closely linked to ecological factors such as

humidity, temperature, salinity, sand formations, and other typical features of coastal ecosystems. Such specific ecological conditions make these habitats particularly valuable, rare in Albania, and in urgent need of careful protection.

The current conflict is not only about the environment. It also involves tourism development, foreign investment, disputed land ownership, transparency, public beach access, and the role of state institutions. The controversy has grown around the protected landscape “Pishë Poro–Narta”, the area where a major tourism project is being developed. [Media reports](#) have linked the project company to international investors connected to Jared Kushner and Qatari businessmen. Questions have been raised about the company structure behind the project, including offshore links and anonymous beneficial owners. The land involved is also reportedly connected to long-running court disputes, contested property titles, and figures previously linked to legal controversy.

The debate comes especially after Albania changed its law on protected areas in 2024. The new provisions introduced the concept of “tourism of excellence,” allowing high-end tourism facilities, including at least five-star accommodation, in certain protected areas. This has weakened the original purpose of protection and created a legal path for large-scale tourism infrastructure in fragile ecosystems.

The issue is especially sensitive because Vjosë-Narta has already been affected by another major project: the Vlora International Airport, which has also been found to be [violating the Bern Convention](#) on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and the [Convention on Migratory Species](#).

We recognise that the EU already [published in September 2025](#) its official position, urging the Albanian Government to repeal the amendments 21/2024 to the Law on protected areas, which allow mass development in core zones, if the country aims to join the European Union. We recognise and applaud that the European Parliament already strengthened that position with its [June 2026 Resolution](#) urging additionally the Albanian Government to establish a moratorium on all new permitting procedures, construction works and development interventions within protected areas until the incompatible provisions of the amended Law on Protected Areas have been repealed. Nevertheless, the Albanian government has not yet prioritised this benchmark and the consequent decision-making has driven people to mass protests in recent weeks.

There is still a lot the EC can do at the moment. The EC has two main tools to send a clear message to Albania on the need to ensure the resilience of its nature and water – the accession process and funding – and it is essential to use these more actively.

The EU has made significant investments into the rule of law in Albania, as well as nature protection. A 2022 [European Court of Auditors report](#) found that EUR 130 million had been spent between 2014 and 2020 on rule of law-related reforms in the country. But across the Western Balkans, *‘while EU action has contributed to reforms in technical and operational areas, such as improving the efficiency of the judiciary and the development of relevant legislation, it has had little overall impact on fundamental rule of law reforms in the region. A key reason for this is the insufficient domestic political will to drive the necessary reforms.’*

The [EU4Nature](#) project is currently ongoing with EU support. It includes the development of crucial legislation needed to ensure Albania adopts the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, as well as management plans for existing protected areas. Pishë Poro–Narta is one of these areas. Yet the ongoing destruction of protected areas runs counter to the goals of these directives and the project. It is not the first time accession countries have taken advantage of the pre-accession period to complete investments that are clearly not allowed under EU law, and the preparation work done on the project should have tackled this risk.

While the EU's country reports have repeatedly drawn attention to Albania's lack of progress in environmental and transparency matters, as well as ongoing corruption and rule of law issues, the EU needs to send clearer messages in this regard. Ironically, in the same week the protests started, the European Union approved the [Interim Benchmark Assessment Report \(IBAR\)](#) for Albania.

CEE Bankwatch Network and its member groups fully support the Albanian civic reaction against destruction of nature and lack of transparency in environmental decision-making, as well as the clear requests [96 Albanian CSOs](#) have sent to the Albanian Parliament:

- 1) immediate repeal of the provisions introduced by Law No. 21/2024 amending the Law “On Protected Areas”,
- 2) immediate launch of a transparent, inclusive and expert-based process for the review of Law No. 81/2017 “On Protected Areas”, with the aim of fully aligning it with the European Directives and
- 3) establishment of a moratorium of permits for new tourism and infrastructure developments in protected areas, until the legal framework is fully aligned.

We welcome the fact that the European Commission has requested written clarifications from the Albanian Government regarding the environmental standards applicable to the project. However, given the ecological value of the site and the rule of law and fundamental rights implications, written government assurances cannot be considered sufficient unless they are publicly disclosed, independently verified and followed by concrete corrective action.

In this context, and considering that the EU has already publicly recognised that Albania's recent decisions on protected areas are inconsistent with EU environmental standards and accession obligations, we ask the European Commission to:

1. Publicly reaffirm that Albania's accession process cannot advance on the basis of formal assurances alone, but requires verifiable compliance with the EU environmental acquis and other relevant international obligations.
2. Treat the Vjosë-Narta case and the 2024 amendments to the Law on Protected Areas as a serious accession issue, not only under Chapter 27, but also in relation to the fundamentals cluster, rule of law, transparency, public participation, property rights, anti-corruption and institutional accountability.

3. Request the Albanian Government to report publicly and in writing on how it intends to reconcile the proposed Vjosë-Narta tourism development with Albania obligations under Chapter 27.
4. Organise an urgent joint technical mission of DG ENV, DG ENEST and the EU Delegation to Albania to visit Vjosë–Narta–Pishë–Poro, meet with civil society, independent experts, local communities and relevant institutions, and assess the situation on the ground. Hold an urgent meeting with Albanian civil society organisations, independent biodiversity experts and affected local communities before relying on further government assurances regarding the project.

We would be pleased to arrange an online meeting to clarify these requests, should that be helpful.

Best regards,



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On behalf of CEE Bankwatch Network and member groups:

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	Bankwatch Romania , Romania
 Centar za životnu sredinu	CZZS – Centar za životnu sredinu (Centre for Environment), Bosnia and Herzegovina

 Friends of the Earth CEPA	Priatel'ia Zeme-CEPA (Friends of the Earth-CEPA), Slovakia
	Ecoaction – Centre for Environmental Initiatives, Ukraine
	EDEN – Environmental Center for Development, Education and Networking, Albania
 Eesti Roheline Liikumine Estonian Green Movement-FoE	Eesti Roheline Liikumine (Estonian Green Movement), Estonia
	Eko-svest – Center for Environmental Research and Information, North Macedonia
	Green Alternative , Georgia
 Zaļā brīvība	Zaļā brīvība (Green Liberty), Latvia
 Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége Föld Barátai Magyarország	MTVSZ – National Society of Conservationists, Hungary

	NECU – National Ecological Centre of Ukraine, Ukraine
	PGN – Union/Alliance of Associations Polish Green Network, Poland
	Za Zemiata – Environmental Association, Bulgaria
	Zelena akcija – Friends of the Earth Croatia, Croatia