

Albania: Beyond the destruction of the nature and the culture of Kelmend - its habitants are asking for help

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The region of Kelmend is a mountain region situated at the extreme North of Albania. It is situated between Montenegro for 68 km (66,6%) of its circumference and the villages of Kastrati, Shkrel and Shalë. Its circumference is 102km and total area is 353km². High mountains (+2000m) constitute 59.7 % of the territory. Many pastures are over 2000m high. Geology characteristics are mainly karstic. There are four valleys, which cover 40,3 % of the territory. They are having the same name as the rivers, Valley of Vermosh 1000 – 1050 m high, Valley of Lepushe 1050 – 1250 m high, Valley of Cemi from Selce having 200 – 1200 m. high, Valley of Cemi from Vukel 200 – 900 m high. The altitude of the mountains surrounding them is 2000 – 2500 m high and covers 59,7 % of the territory. Let us give some precision about the river CEMI which is in danger. Its length 62km 255 km². Surface of the watershed 368 km², the median basin height : 1237.6m, its hydrographic network density :1.48 km / km². This river is formed by two main branches, Cemi of Vukli 17,9 km with 10m³/s and Cemi of Selca, 22,5 km and 4m³/s having a rich flow after joining with an annual average flow rate of 26m³/sec. During wet season, the annual average flow is 84% of total flow. During dry period, it has 16% of it. The highest flow rate is in December (45.2m³ / sec) in relation to rainfall, while the second maximum feed is in April (44.4m³ / sec) in relation to snow melting. Along this river exists one of the most magnificent natural and ecological habitats. This high biological diversity is primarily due to the action of favorable factors, mainly ecological-geographic character. The biologists have registered 131 vertebrate species, namely 4 fish species of, 8 species amphibians, 20 reptiles, 64 birds and 35 mammals. The fish found in the Albanian part of Cem and Vermosh river are of 4 species. Regarding the floristic aspects we have a very rich biological and landscape diversity, with old species, some of which are endemic or sub-endemic. The valley of CEMI is only 0.9% of the surface of Albania, but are existing more than 800 plant species / 1100 recorded in AL Alps. It has the highest density of flora in Europe, 3 species / km², a lot of pasture and medicinal and aromatic plants. The highest flora 's density from Europe is in Kelmend. Some of them only grow in Cemi Valley, has been found up to now 3500 species, 31% of all European Flora, 200 sub-endemic species and 400 Balkan species.

Let us arrive to the situation regarding the hydropowers in our region. 2 of them were existing before 1990. And one has been build up recently in Selce without any authorization of the habitants and signature of the municipality. Actually one is being build up in Tamarë, the river is deviated and entubed on a distance of 3 km. Very soon will begin another one in Grope in Selce. Concession has been signed by the municipality of Kopliku without any autorisation of the local population which has not consulted and nether any information is given to them. According to Information according to internet: concession for 6 have been signed and should be created. Information according to COE: 14 hydropower are in prevision. Construction of hydropower plants on the Cem River has to be strictly forbidden. The construction of small hydropower plants in alpine rivers, such as the Cem River etc., is a major cause of breaking biodiversity, natural monuments, ecotourism and for all the inhabitants of the area, will lead to

big tragedy. The introduction of water into the pipes with miles of kilometers, that means the river is drying, damages not only the Cemi trout, but all the natural and cultural biodiversity, and the social life of all its habitants. They are totally abused. Nether any informations neither consultations towards the population has existed. There was an opposition from the habitants to the hydropower from Selce included by the municipality. It was build up without any authorization and without taking in consideration the local population. Any study on the consequences on the environment has been done. The Government is only giving wrong informations to the population and lying, manipulating the population and doing strong repression in case of any contestation. The water resources of the Cem Valley are also part of the many powerful resources, almost all of karstic origin.

Social and economic datas : Kelmend is composed of 8 villages with a lot of hamlets isolated one from the other, and has about 6000 habitants. Most of the population is living in extreme poverty. Their main activity is agro-pastoral economy of transhumance. 60 % of the population was constraint to survival forced emigration. There is a total lack of infrastructure. A life on the spot that becomes more and more difficult. It exists no support for the abandoned population. Everything is done by the mere force of their wrist. They remain without any strength to fight alone. There is no future prospects for young people, they are leaving the country, being deseperated.

Our tragedy : No more water, no more pastoralism, neither agriculture, neither tourism, neither medicinal plants, neither fishing. The cultural identity of the region will disappear. Fishing reservoirs will no more be existing as well as the fauna and flora growing along these rivers. Les êtres humains sont des maillons des chaînes écologiques. The destruction of the environment is the destruction of the human beings and the civilisation. What will become of these inhabitants who are attached to this territory, and who defended and preserved it, who will be interested in them? Which cultural survie when the natural and social environment will be totally degraded ?

Kelmend region has great potentials for sustainable development. A virgin nature & culture which should be a protected area recognised as MAB protected area by Unesco. Clever equitable and solidar ecotourism and ethnotourism development is very pertinent for our region. The redevelopment of transhumance agropastoralism which should inscribed within the mediterranean network of pastoralism. Looking forward that all the actors are working with deep respect together in synergy. A main road is now build up and this corridor towards Montenegro offers many cross-border possibilities.

Our fight : We began a petition in France, very few signatures, in Albania it was impossible. The population is too much threatened for the consequences. We made raising awareness among the general public, political institutions and the scientific community. We mobilized Albanian and European journalists to come and advocate for Kelmend. We built up first contacts with NGOs for the Protection of the Environment and for Human Rights. We tried to get in contact with UNESCO asking protection and help, but Unesco answered : The Albanian government answered to them, nothing interesting in Kelmend, no vulnet for asking any protection. We were trying to get in contact with the others fighting the same problems, by everyone is only interested to save its own valley and see us concurrent. We are really living on the shadow of the other rivers, and valley fightings. Unfortunately we have very little results. The local population is powerless to defend by themselves, helpless and discouraged. We feel

isolated and forgotten by all. There is a big desolidarity. We have a total lack of access to information. The State is also blocking the information, making decision without the knowledge of the local population which is pushed out of their own lands. There is a lack of transparency of the State .

Call towards a future : Development options for the region: quality ecotourism, transhumant agropastoralism and traditional culinary products as well as the preservation of medicinal plants. These axes of development are undermined by the tendency of the Power to build hydroelectrics, for which we, as inhabitants, do not agree and try to lead a resistance to the corruptive state licenses. The flora and fauna will be definitively damaged, especially medicinal plants including trout culture in the river Cemi which is of great wealth and agropastoralism. Also all our culture will no more be existing. What should be recognised as a world natural and cultural heritage will be forever destroyed. Let us be united all together, building up an ethical charta which should be irreproachable. Please let have more solidarization letting informations to be in circulation. And please, don't forget us. Use your social networks also in favor of Kelmend and help us. The scientific community could join together making interdisciplinary scientific expertises within a common fight, publications about all Illyrian Alps. Let independent experts to come to us for impact studies. My idea was also a support protest trekking for tourist coming all over the world asking to stop this destruction and that joined demand is made to UNESCO for protection of all the Illyrian Alps. I would like to assure you that our community is a serious partner therefore who wants to totally involved in all the development strategies. All initiatives should be done in full respect of the ecological and cultural values which grounded our identity as habitants from Kelmend.

Road towards the future, undertaking steps together : building up together a strategic development plan which preserves the integrity of the natural and cultural biodiversity with wider participation of the inhabitants and in a deep solidarity of professional skills and heart and synergy of actions, with the integration of strong elements of protection of the environment and the local culture in a high valued faultless ethic. With immediate application under neutral international control and supervision in order to prevent the development of the region in a spontaneous and deregulated way with irremediable consequences for the future and its destruction. Kelmend is a priority as well as each other river in Balkany. Cemi also belongs to the blue heart of Europe

No water, no life :
Invitation let's build all together a water planet