

Conclusions of the 4th International Conference on the Protection of the Salina Ulcinj (Montenegro)

Preamble:

The Salina Ulcinj is one of the most important resting, breeding and wintering sites for migratory birds on the eastern Adriatic coast. On 18th April 2018, CZIP, the Martin Schneider-Jacoby Association (MJSA) and MANS from Montenegro, in cooperation with the EuroNatur Foundation and BirdLife Europe, organized the 4th International Conference on the Protection of the Salina Ulcinj in Montenegro's capital Podgorica. More than 80 participants attended the conference, including the Minister for Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro, ambassadors and deputy ambassadors to Montenegro of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Slovenia and the EU, the deputy mayor of the Municipality of Ulcinj, former salt workers, as well as a wide range of national and international experts.

Commitment to the establishment of the Salina as a protected area had been made by Montenegrin authorities already during the 1st International Conference on the Protection of the Salina Ulcinj in April 2015. However, only limited progress has been achieved since then and Salina Ulcinj remains unprotected, nationally as well as internationally. On the contrary, the Salina Ulcinj has experienced severe deterioration over the past three years with well documented loss of natural values and a serious risk of complete collapse of its ecological functionality as a saltpans complex.

Given the Salina's value as a future Natura 2000 site, both the European Commission and the European Parliament have repeatedly emphasized that they expect the Montenegrin Government to protect and restore the Salina Ulcinj as part of Montenegro's accession process towards the EU. While the current municipal spatial plan prevents any construction within the Salina, the process of declaring the site a protected area has so far not progressed and has been characterised by numerous delays, unfulfilled promises and missed deadlines.

Conclusions of the conference:

- The participants of the 4th International Conference on the Protection of the Salina Ulcinj agreed that the Salina Ulcinj is of utmost importance for the European Natural Heritage in general and for birds in particular.
- The Montenegrin Minister for Sustainable Development and Tourism, Mr Pavle Radulović, stated at the conference that the Government of Montenegro approved the recommendation of the Protection Study for Ulcinj Salina (prepared by Sovinc, Tome and Hosek, and funded by the EU) and he confirmed a clear roadmap for the protection of the site. According to the statement of the Minister it is foreseen to establish a Nature Park (protected area according to IUCN category V) on the territory of the entire Salina Ulcinj, to restore its ecological functionality, to re-establish a high quality salt production and to manage the nature park properly.

- The roadmap, as presented by the Minister, foresees the following steps: the Ministry will forward the approval of the Government for the designation of the Nature Park to the municipality of Ulcinj within one month, while the municipality will declare the Nature Park by the end of 2018 the latest. Immediately afterwards the Ministry will officially nominate Ulcinj Salina as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.
- The organisers of the conference welcomed the clear commitment made by Minister Radulović and stressed that they expect this commitment to be fulfilled within the timeline indicated by the Minister.
- The Minister stated that he considers the Salina to be state owned land. However, numerous interventions have highlighted the concern about the fact, that the question of land ownership of the salt pans is still not legally resolved. The organisers of the conference call on the Montenegrin Government to clarify the ownership in the most forceful and urgent way. Without complete clarity in this respect, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to attract a competent manager, to start any private-public-partnership, and to raise funds for the crucial restoration and management of the Salina Ulcinj.
- The organisers of the conference have declared their commitment to support the restoration and management efforts, as soon as the Salina Ulcinj has a legal protection status as Nature Park (protected area according to IUCN category V) as well as Ramsar site and the ownership of the land by the state of Montenegro has been legally approved. Such support could cover the sharing of expertise, help in attracting potential investors and managers and fundraising to cover the costs for restoration and management of Ulcinj Salina.

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EuroNatur, BirdLife Europe, CZIP, MJSA, MANS

