

## Preface

Some thirty years ago, while descending on a holiday flight into Corfu airport, I was offered a spectacular view of a wild river flowing from the Albanian mountains towards the Adriatic and Ionian Sea. I was fascinated by the sight and thought that this river – its name unknown to me – would make an excellent reference and study site for undisturbed river floodplain ecosystems.

The opportunity to study the Vjosa came more than 25 years later within the framework of the „Save the Blue Heart of Europe“ campaign, when we learned that two major hydropower dams had been commissioned to be built in the river's lower part. From all our knowledge, it was clear that these dam constructions would destroy a natural heritage of European significance.

Within the framework of the campaign, we initiated a cooperation with Albanian colleagues, first in form of a workshop on the Vjosa catchment at the University in Tirana, and consequently as a joint research programme. This volume is the output of these cooperative efforts. We acknowledge the financial and logistical support of the NGOs RiverWatch, EuroNatur and EcoAlbania in all of these activities.

We hope that the information presented in this volume contributes to the recognition of the outstanding value of the Vjosa landscape, and convinces Albanian decision makers that the catchment should be maintained as a national monument and not be destroyed by hydropower dams of short-sighted economic value.

I would like to thank Wolfram GRAF, Aleko MIHO and Sajmir BEQIRAJ, who functioned as guest editors for this volume, and Thomas FRANK and Anton DRESCHER, who were particularly helpful in putting the series of papers together. The editors of *Acta ZooBot Austria*, Rudolf MAIER and Benjamin SEAMAN did an excellent job of preparing the diverse manuscripts.

I would like to thank all our colleagues who contributed manuscripts on the physical, environmental and biological characteristics of this fascinating river system, opening up the challenge for continued research and further joint research efforts.

Fritz SCHIEMER



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Artikel/Article: [Preface IX](#)