

07. Evros / Meriç / Maritsa Delta – Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey



The Evros Delta is situated at the north-eastern part of Greece on the border with Turkey. It is considered one of the most important European wetlands because of its strategic position and its ecological value as a significant point for migrating birds. The region hosts 108 species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive, some of which are threatened worldwide.

Human intervention, especially during the 1950s-1980s, altered the landscape dramatically. Dams, canals, dikes, flood control and irrigation projects served the needs of the local population for arable land, while at the same time degrading the wetland and leading to the extinction of certain fish and bird species. Despite the disastrous effects of all these interventions, farmers at the lower (southern) part of the wetland did not benefit from the new lands due to the high salinity of the reclaimed soils.

The area has always been a cultural crossroads, influenced by Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Franks, Bulgarians and Turks and has therefore developed a particular cultural character. In the near proximity of the Delta, on Doriskos hill (inhabited from Neolithic to Hellenistic times), the Persian king Xerxes built a fortress so large that, according to Plinius, it could accommodate 10,000 men. The Roman settlement of Traianoupolis was established by emperor Markus Ulpius Traianus during the 2nd century AD. As its location was strategic, next to the thermal springs and the Via Egnatia which connected Rome with Constantinople, it turned the town into a transit station.

The church of the Virgin Mary Cosmosotiras is the most significant Byzantine monument of the entire region of Thrace, built by Isaac Comnene in the 12th century AD. During the 16th century, within the site of Roman Traianoupolis, the domed bathhouses were built. The thermal springs have been attracting visitors since ancient times and are still in operation.

Traditional activities still practised are hunting and fishing. Fishing is still practised using traditional methods and equipment that have not altered considerably during the last decades. The boat type that is used is the one without a keel (blava) and is made of wood. The traditional use of nets, trawl lines and fish traps are the main fishing methods. Within the Delta area, three fishing reserves are found. One of them, Paloukia, is actually a lagoon functioning in the same way as in the past.

In recent years, remarkable eco-tourist activities have been promoted in the region. Guided tours and boat trips are organised, while visitors can call on the Evros Delta Visitor Centre, acquire informational material about the wetland and see the related exhibition. The Centre also takes care of wounded birds brought in by locals, feeds birds in the Delta area during winter and participates actively in local events. Other activities of the Centre include water quality controls, bird monitoring, site safety measures in co-operation with the responsible authorities, effective management of vegetation (tree plantation) etc. Throughout the year, folklore and religious activities take place in the surrounding villages.

A major threat for the site has appeared in 2007 through the agreement of Bulgaria, Greece and Russia jointly to construct a petroleum pipe line from Burgas in the Black Sea to Alexandroupolis in the Aegean. It is hoped that a careful environmental assessment may mitigate the potential negative impacts.