

Serbia almost does not treat wastewater at all, which is why between 250 and 300 new plants for their treatment (WWTP) will soon be needed on the territory of the republic. Belgrade is the only capital in Europe that disposes of municipal wastewater in the immediate vicinity without treatment. They mainly overflow into the Danube and Sava, causing problems, including pollution and sludge deposition in riverbeds and tributaries. Experts claim that outdated technology will be used for wastewater treatment in Belgrade and throughout Serbia, and that the planning and contracting of the plant is done behind the backs of the public. According to experts, plans for the construction of treatment plants have existed for a long time, and the dynamics of planning and construction has been accelerated by the part of negotiations for accession to the European Union concerning Chapter 27 (dedicated to the environment and climate change), and related announcements of tightening wastewater treatment.

It is an opportunity to make something the most modern, the cheapest, the best for the next generations, hydrogeologists and hydraulic engineers believe. Instead, as they say, a scenario is being prepared to design and install outdated technology in all municipalities in Serbia, which cannot be sold in more developed countries - but can in our country. Branislav Bozovic, former secretary for environmental protection in Belgrade, Cedo Maksimovic, professor emeritus at Imperial College London, and Ksenija Radovanovic, architect, urban planner and chief researcher of the recently published Study on the (un) treatment of the most populated wastewater, discussed this issue at the beginning of the week. places in Serbia "Clear picture of the waters of Belgrade". The conversation was organized by the Organization for Political Ecology Polekol, under whose auspices the research was done and published.

The public and the profession excluded from planning

The presented research focuses on plans for the construction of a wastewater treatment plant in Veliko Selo. WWTP "Veliko selo" is the largest of the planned 11 plants, towards the realization of which more decisive steps were taken during the last year. The mayor of Belgrade, Zoran Radojicic, stated that this factory will be the main part of the system that will solve the issue of sewage in New Belgrade and Zemun, and in which 80% of all wastewater in the capital could be directed, Studio B reported at the beginning of the year. According to the publication "Clear image of the waters of Belgrade", negotiations with the Chinese company "China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC), intensively conducted in 2016, were crowned in January 2020. Agreement on cooperation in financing research and design work for collection and treatment of wastewater of the central sewerage system of Belgrade and the Contractual Agreement for the project of collection and treatment of wastewater of the central sewerage system of the city of Belgrade. These agreements cover the first phase of WWTP construction and are worth about 270m euros. Radovanović stated that the budget of the capital for 2020 foresaw around 230 million euros

for these purposes, as well as that it was planned for the project to be financed from a loan. In July last year, however, Goran Vesić stated that the money for the first phase of works on the plant was provided by the Government of Serbia and that they were worth 285 million euros.

It is difficult to talk about the details of the project because, as he says, the public was informed about it exclusively through the media. Therefore, Radovanović assessed that the general public and commercial actors were excluded from the dialogue on defining the general concept and technology. The researcher criticized the fact that the signing of the mentioned agreements and the adoption of the plan of detailed regulation of the location on which the plant will be built came without consultation with the citizens and the respective professions. She drew attention to the fact that old concepts were used in the planning and that the academic and professional public could respond to many ambiguities, if it was adequately involved.

Instead, he said, among the many open questions, it remained unclear why the treated wastewater from the future plant would not be used for industrial or agricultural purposes, but discharged into the Danube tributary; what will happen to the sludge that is formed as a by-product of the process, and the like.

Such issues should be defined through the planning documentation adopted so far, the researcher explains, adding that the plan for the dynamics of WWTP construction is also a great unknown. The problem is that the answers to all these questions are not in publicly available documents, but have been moved to the stage of drafting technical documentation that is not open to the public. As Radovanovic warns:

“We have signed agreements that have just not started to be valid and the planning documentation has been prepared, which means that in the near future we can start the realization of this plant, without having answers to key questions about it.” All the details were deleted from the plans, so that the citizens did not have anything to discuss on the only moment when they could debate this. ”

Radovanović also explained that the study on environmental impact assessment is not a sufficient guarantee that everything will be fine, because the appropriate law allows the investor to do the study in similar cases after obtaining a building permit.

“It puts the citizens, as well as the institutions, in front of the finished act, because in the end it is very expensive to tell someone that he should change everything after he has prepared all the documentation.”

According to the researcher, other potential commercial partners were not involved in contracting the project. On the one hand, that was made possible by signing an interstate agreement between Serbia and China. In addition, the newly adopted law on line and infrastructure facilities of special importance for the Republic of Serbia also enables it not to announce a public competition for certain types of facilities, including this one.



Belgrade wastewater treatment

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