

The Association Zeleni Neretva held a public debate in Konjic titled “The consequences of (not) including the public in the decision making regarding the environment” The public debate was held on December 28, 2015 in cooperation with the Heinrich Boll Foundation BiH Office while representatives of cantonal and municipal authorities were present along with the local media and representatives of other non government organizations and other interested citizens.

The intention of the organizers was to present to the general public mostly negative examples of excluding the public from deciding when it comes to risky eco projects in the area of Konjic municipality. Therefore the topics presented were: “waste management in Konjic municipality”, “planning and construction of mini HPP in the area of Konjic municipality” and “planning and construction of HPP Ulog on Neretva in the borderline area of Konjic municipality”. Even though it was proven that participative decision making (on the environment issues) is the key issue of direct participative democracy, it was shown in practice that educating the public regarding this topic does not give sufficient results if it is not accompanied with elaboration of specific examples. So the intention of this debate was to learn from already completed procedures that passed without public involvement. The topic “planning and construction of mini HPP in the area of Konjic municipality” brought conclusions that daily political promises of development and prosperity that will come from constructing mini HPP on Neretva tributaries was an empty promise since the municipality gave concessions for the construction of 41 mini HPP and only one of them is functioning after 15 years. The main reason for this misbalance (promised/done) lies in hast promises and blank granted concessions.

However the biggest interest was raised by the presentation of the project HPP Ulog and its current status. The project HPP Ulog (Kalinovnik, RS) is located on the entity border and all possible negative impacts would occur downstream in Konjic municipality in the Federation BiH. Even though entity laws provide for the public debate to be held in both entities (Konjic and Kalinovnik municipalities) it never happened and in a non transparent way the project was granted permits (environment and construction permit) to build without the adequate input from the public, which put the entire project on the brink of being legal. After the preparatory work (building approach roads) the concession company (EFT-HPP ULOG) encountered problems because of geologically instable ground, so they had to stop the project. Even though it was known before that the construction site lies on unstable ground (which is the reason several floods occurred downstream due to the movement and landslide) the concession company made some huge construction operations and in that way additionally deteriorated the geological stability of the wider area. It is clear that the entire

Bosnia: Why is the public not included in decision making regarding risky environment projects

process of planning and constructing this controversial hydro power plant would be much less harmful and dangerous if the procedure of granting the environmental permit was conducted in a transparent way with participation of all interested parties. But in the way it was done the location of the planned HPP Ulog represents grave danger for the people living downstream on the riverbanks of Neretva