

Businesses and ordinary people need to work together if fragile Black Sea environments are not to be overwhelmed and degraded by mass tourism, experts warn

While Bulgaria's Black Sea resorts are fast preparing for the upcoming summer season, environmental experts are mulling new ways to protect ecosystems that they fear are at risk from uncontrolled development and mass tourism.

Rumen Draganov, director of the Institute for Analysis and Assessment of Tourism, recently called on both public institutions and ordinary citizens in Bulgaria to take better care of the environment.

"Each of us has an opportunity to act or, on the contrary, to stay passive, when it is a case of polluting the environment," he told BIRN.

Many local and international environmental experts were shocked last year when more than 100 dolphins were found washed up and dead on beaches on the Black Sea coast.

Similar incidents, believed to be attributable to growing marine pollution, have been noted in previous years - but the mass dolphin deaths in 2016 represented a worrying record in a decade.

While the official cause of the dolphins' death has yet to be determined, the death of so many of these much-loved marine mammals has merged with the growing number of other pollution-related incidents, loss of biodiversity and coastal degradation.

Another worry is the sand dunes along the Bulgarian coast, which face a major threat from unsustainable development linked to mass tourism.

According to the results of an international study in 2016, the environment near the cities of Varna and Burgas is among those that have suffered the worst damage.

Draganov mentioned also the countless cigarette butts or used tram tickets that lie scattered in the streets all over Bulgaria.

He is convinced that the whole of Bulgarian society must get more involved in the process of preserving ecosystems, and that the field should even be considered a matter of national security.

Ecosystem services are seen as everything that people receive from nature.

From the regulation of natural processes, such as climate change, to material products such as food and wood, to non-material cultural benefits like the joy of spending time in the wild, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment summarizes all of these as "the benefits that people obtain from ecosystems".

Last October in Burgas, eastern Bulgaria, a number of organisations - the Balkani Wildlife Society, the BlueLink Foundation from Bulgaria and the Norwegian organization GRID-Arendal - presented a Strategy for Sustainable Use of Black Sea Coastal Ecosystems that

suggested new ways to harmonise business needs and ecosystem services in a more sustainable way.

Among the first priority measures they called for was “defining ecosystem services as a national treasure and maintaining and improving them as a part of national security”.

Rumen Draganov, who worked on the strategy, links the health of ecosystems to food safety and the “integrity we should provide to nature”, having in mind that “tourism is also a major destroyer of the wonders of nature”.

According to him, Bulgarian legislation already connects the need for environmental protection with the issue of security – but only in a “general” way.

Bulgaria’s National Security Strategy focuses on possible risks to the environment and lists industrial accidents that cause hazardous emissions, air, water and coastal pollution.

Terrorism is another defined threat, as it uses substances that are extremely hazardous to the environment, among others.

But Plamen Peev, an international expert on environmental policies and legislation, who worked on the Strategy for Sustainable Use of Black Sea Coastal Ecosystems, says knowledge about ecosystems and their services depends also on people and organizations getting involved who are not directly responsible for national security.

“Ecosystem services create an economic paradigm, a bypass that translates environmental security values to the language and interests of common people as far as possible,” he said. Draganov believes that simply understanding the importance of ecosystems is not enough; collective action is needed to preserve them.

One idea contained in the Strategy for Sustainable Use of Black Sea Coastal Ecosystems is the development of so-called tourist business parks in Bulgaria, as has been done already in countries like Switzerland and France.

According to Draganov, only minor amendments to Bulgaria’s Tourism Act are needed to restructure the country’s touristic regions as tourism business parks.

An important principle of this concept is for the tourism business to voluntarily get involved in contractual payments to help preserve the nature and ecosystems of the park.

The money received from these voluntary payments is directed to those who protect and develop ecosystems, at the same maintaining the competitiveness of tourist industry.

Following meetings between representatives of municipalities and businesspeople, several regions on the Black Sea coast have shown interest in having tourism parks, including the municipalities of Burgas and Pomorie.

“The sustainable use of ecosystems and the services they provide is possible not only by imposing legislation, but mainly by understanding the meaning of life and what we do as

living and sentient beings,” Draganov concluded.

Source: [balkaninsight](#)