

In Bosnia and Herzegovina because of the destructiveness of the war, and then neoliberal economic policies, the people of this state were left exclusively with water and forests as a place of defense against a coalition of state and capital that relentlessly exploits its resources. When we talk about Bosnia and Herzegovina in the context of forests, we are talking about the richest European country. The way in which forests are (not) managed in that country leaves the impression that it is a resource that is easier to regenerate than to cut down. The causes are classically global and classically Bosnian: only forests protected by people stand in the way of the exploitative entrepreneurial element wanna be elita and their investors.

We can now, without much hesitation, talk about a kind of matrix of resource exploitation on the European (semi) periphery. This is confirmed by the statements of environmental activists in this topic. After the destruction of industry and economic sectors that massively employed labor in this area, after the war and privatization processes, it was time for the relentless exploitation of natural resources, but fortunately, a massive, organized and reflective reaction of the population. At the same time, these rivers, and especially forests, are often a kind of unwritten and unregulated social measures. The impoverished population finds in them an additional resource for survival, most often through the use of wood as an energy source or through the harvesting of forest crops, which are then most often sold along frequent highways. But instead of blaming its poor citizens for the exploitation of forests, who pay for their income or non-existent energy infrastructure, let's try to find reasons in some other dynamics that include domestic authorities and the wood industry, but very often global economic players.

Perhaps it is in the fact that forests are a kind of social measure, and that their importance for quality of life is measured and felt in some larger periods of time, we can find reasons why they are not so much under scrutiny, except for a few environmental activists and forestry experts. In a quick mapping of the ecological picture of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it should be noted that civic activism against the construction of small hydropower plants has grown into a kind of revolt with concrete results, from the river Kruščica through Bjelava to Neretva. On the other hand, forest resources and their exploitation still remain an area where such activities are not noticed, although the media has long talked about the "yacht for wood wealth" which is most faithfully reflected through the growth of pallets or felling and removal of trees. Every trace is lost.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Agency (FAO), Bosnia and Herzegovina is the forest-richest country in the region, and one of the richest in Europe. This data speaks for itself about the ecological and social importance of forests in this

country, but also about the economic interest in its exploitation, especially if it is unplanned and uncontrolled. This unplanned and uncontrolled exploitation of forests in Bosnia and Herzegovina is affected by several factors. The first is certainly, as in other areas, the structure of the state itself, and then the organization of ownership and management of forest resources, which is especially problematic in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina where there is no umbrella law on forests, although nominally the entity owns forests. cantonal public enterprises. Along with them, important actors are certainly local self-government, especially in rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where forests are almost the only remaining resource that then serves the municipal authorities to broker with it as their own grandfather through arrangements with domestic powerful construction investors or multinationals companies.

### **Natural disasters reveal the extent of forest damage**

What you will hear from experts in the field of forestry, but also from environmental activists, is that it is impossible to assess how and to what extent the forests of Bosnia and Herzegovina are cut down. There are no exact data, and the consequences of this unfortunate logging can be seen only when nature shows its destructive power like the floods of 2014, which were especially devastating in the hilly and forested areas of Central Bosnia, carrying everything in front of them and causing landslides. due to excessive deforestation. So, instead of the exact data that should have been the responsibility of public institutions that do not or do not want to deal with it, we are left with folk and activist ethnography, which in the history of this area served to create and compile a picture of reality in the absence of other tools. We will use it in this case as well, in order to at least somewhat conjure up a picture of forest looting in Bosnia and Herzegovina through several pictures.

We will start with the capital, or its surroundings. Year after year, Sarajevo alone is witnessing an ecological catastrophe and air pollution, the final formula of which includes the destruction of urban greenery, as well as excessive deforestation in its surroundings. Namely, the excessive pollution of this urban center is due to the lack of green areas in the city and the lack of ventilation corridors that would provide these green areas and possibly "absorb" polluted air. Dalibor Ballian, a professor from the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Sarajevo, spoke about this recently at a lecture within the Classroom program of the Red Association. Among other things, he emphasized that the biggest problem of forestry in Bosnia and Herzegovina today is their unregulated use and exploitation. Proof of this unregulation, and then the already mentioned relations of different levels of

government in forest management, should not go far from Sarajevo, which is suffocating in smog. It is enough to go a few kilometers to the mountains that surround the city and just save it from an even bigger ecological catastrophe. On the slopes of Bjelašnica, which belong to the Municipality of Trnovo, ecocide and systematic looting of wood raw materials have been going on for several years.

Namely, on the slopes of Bjelašnica, as well as on some neighboring mountains that belong to another bh. entity, has long been cleared, dug and demolished with the aim of building new tourist facilities. Of the famous Olympic mountains on which it was built with some plan, function and regulation, there are bare ones where a tourist resort sprang up without any plan and infrastructure. One of them is the sports and business center on Bjelašnica, within the construction of which 3.5 Ha of forest was cut down, for which it is still unknown where it ended, ie for all purposes and for whose profit a thousand cubic meters of beech were used. This was achieved by the municipal authorities, investors and contractors despite the fact that the cantonal government did not approve the environmental permit and despite the fact that the cantonal forestry inspectors recorded and reported it all. The conversations that colleagues from the Center for Investigative Journalism had with the actors of this story sound almost unbelievable and more than faithfully testify to the almost comical level of deregulation of forest resources in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The mayor pretends to be crazy and ignores the cantonal authorities and possibly pays a mini-fine, the construction investor doesn't care about the forests anyway, and the winners are local companies that deal with logging and wood processing. In other words, all sides are settled, Sarajevo is suffocating in smog, forests are disappearing, but it doesn't matter. We will ski! For another example, we will go to Central Bosnia and the town of Vareš. There are no ski resorts there, but there is gold. Or so it was thought. Namely, a couple of years ago, this bazaar, which was completely forgotten and which is one of the classic stories of our deindustrialized periphery, ended up in all regional media. British Adriatic Metals with its subsidiary Eastern Mining, registered in Australia, received a concession from the FBiH Government for exploration and surface excavation with the aim of finding ores. Although the story about gold deposits, the primary interest of this Australian company, spread sensationally in the media, the extraction of somewhat less precious metals such as zinc, lead and barite. Of course, the dominant media discourse regarding this case was festive, which is not surprising considering the complete economic devastation of this area. New jobs and the economic progress of the neglected area were in the spotlight. However, the Municipality of Vareš covers 70 percent of its area with forests which, as in previous examples, were managed unplanned and uncoordinated between the various levels of

government that manage these resources. The arrival of British mining investors and their newly tested wells left devastation in the forest cover around Vareš. So far, this is only evidenced by pictures of enthusiasts and researchers who have recorded them on their Facebook profiles, such as Professor Ballian. However, the story of forest exploitation and destruction does not end there. The municipality of Vareš recently allowed investors from Saudi Arabia to build a tourist resort on the wooded slopes of Mount Zvijezda. This fact will only further disrupt the biodiversity of the area, and the infrastructure that would be set up for the countryside of rich sheikhs will not have any public function and can only further harm the environment of this area. But the long-term consequences of such decisions and the management of forest resources are of little interest to anyone.

For a long time, the basic narrative when talking about the environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then about the exploitation of forests, was moralizing. All the responsibility fell on irresponsible individuals and uncultured people. Of course, education in the field of environmental protection is almost non-existent, and the lack of any environmental infrastructure, and especially the law and regulation of specific natural resources, favors the “negligence of citizens”. However, this is only a small part of the problem. As we have shown, forests in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not disappearing because of unscrupulous citizens, but because of the combination of interests of the state and capital, ie the unofficial coalition of a dysfunctional state and its elites from the European periphery and foreign investors. Local intermediaries and mayors also play an important role in all this, thus settling their own small feuds, and probably also private pockets. After the fight against the construction of small hydroelectric power plants, which in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region has taken on the dimensions of a real social movement, it is time for this fight to spread to other fronts – forests. This certainly requires some different methods and approaches, but before that, the exchange of experience and knowledge between activists from all over the Western Balkans who have no choice but to unite around this common struggle because nature has no borders.

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