

What is the outcome of SERBIA in the European Commission Report when it comes to Chapter 27, and are the things actually like that as being written in the Report.

Recently published European Commission Report on enlargement policy for 2016 for Serbia regarding “the most difficult and most expensive” chapter, Chapter 27, which deals with the environment and climate change, says the following: Serbia has achieved some level of preparation in this area. Some progress has been made in further aligning policies and legislation with the acquis, including in waste, nature protection and climate change. Serbia improved its strategic planning and set up a Green Fund, both key recommendations in 2015. In the coming period, Serbia should in particular:

- enhance administrative and financial capacity by strengthening the environmental protection agency’s monitoring and reporting, adequately resourcing the new environmental finance facility (Green Fund) and improving inter-institutional coordination at both central and local level;
- intensify efforts regarding implementation and enforcement including closing noncompliant landfills, investing in waste separation and recycling, reinforcing air quality monitoring and advancing on river basin management;
- ratify the Paris Agreement and start implementing it, including by developing a comprehensive strategy for climate change that is consistent with the EU 2030 framework for climate and energy policies and well integrated in all relevant sectors.

Thus, according to the conclusion of the EC on Chapter 27, Serbia has made a step forward and addressed the key recommendations from the previous year. However, when discussing with the interlocutors from “Vreme”, one gets the impression that the EC was too mild when assessing the situation in Serbia for Chapter 27, as well as some other chapters.

The second conclusion is that, in addition to shortages of money and staff for Serbia’s progress regarding Chapter 27 a lack of political willingness to do anything has been noticed.

“Serbia has been praised for adopting a document in 2015 called “Intended Nationally Determined Contributions for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions” says for “Vreme” Mirko Popovic, project manager in the field of environmental protection in the Belgrade Open School which is a member of the Coalition 27 – a network of organizations that monitor the negotiations on Chapter 27.

“However, if we deal with the basic mathematics from this document, we can see that according to it Serbia does not envisage the reduction of greenhouse gases emission by 2030, but on the contrary – their increase. The document states that compared to 1990 levels Serbia will achieve a reduction of 9.8 percent, but if one refers to figures relating to

2013, we can see that it is actually the increase of 15 percent, "says Popovic.

FINANCING AND CAPACITIES: The solution for the financing of environmental protection is also questionable. Environmental Protection Fund, which was abolished in 2012, has been reestablished through this year's amendments to the Law on Environmental Protection and is called "Green Fund of the Republic of Serbia".

The idea is that, according to the European "polluter pays" principle, resources from this Fund are used for environmental protection. However, the legal solution envisaged that this fund to be so called budgetary fund, in accordance with the law regulating the budget system. In translation, the Ministry of Finance will be in charge of this fund, as well as for the rest of the budget.

"During public debate, when adopting the amendments of the new Law on Environmental Protection, based on the experience we had with funds for environmental protection at the local level, we pointed out that the budget fund solution is not good", says for "Vreme" Ljubinka Kaludjerovic, Secretary of the Committee on Environment and Emergencies, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities.

"At the local level we have the situation when the money overflows through the budget throughout the year, and is not spent on environmental protection, on December 31 we have funds in that position in the budget, and on the first of January the funds are gone.

Therefore, we have unspent funds in a country where everyone is crying out for money. There is something wrong. And it is very possible that this has been happening at the national level, as well" says Kaludjerovic.

She points out that, in addition to finances, a large issue is the lack of administrative capacities, both at central and local level, which the European Commission has stated for years in their reports.

"An illustrative example of how our lack of staff has a negative impact even on the reporting could be the Environmental Protection Agency, where positions have not been filled, in accordance with its job classification. Because there is not enough staff, there is no possibility that someone goes on the spot and check the situation when there is a suspicion in certain information received from the municipalities. And the situation is such that, in some municipalities, people interpret the law in accordance with its practice, and for the same questionnaires one can get completely inconsistent data - for example, data on waste at two neighboring municipalities are such as if one municipality is in Manhattan and the other in central Africa", says Kaludjerovic.

WATER PROTECTION MOST EXPENSIVE: A similar situation is when it comes to nature protection, says for "Vreme" Goran Sekulic from the WWF organization, which is also a

member of the Coalition 27. According to him, the main task in the field of nature protection is the establishment of a European ecological network "Natura 2000". It is a system of protected areas, which focuses on the protection of habitats and species of European Community importance.

However, according to Sekulic, there is neither great progress in Serbia when it comes to legal documents, nor in data collection and mapping, because, according to the directives governing this field, Serbia should complete a detailed mapping of habitats and species and propose area network "Natura 2000".

"The part of water protection and water management is significant, and is usually marked as the most problematic part in Chapter 27 - it requires the largest funds, because of the largest infrastructure measurements, or the construction of a water treatment plant", said Sekulic. "The percentage of municipal waste water being treated before discharged in Serbia is negligible. It is estimated to be less than 10 percent, but functionally it's probably less than five percent.

Actually, whole Belgrade discharges water without treatment - there is no water treatment facility, so there are municipal and industrial water as well, "says Sekulic, adding that, in addition to already mentioned lack of staff, there is no cooperation between sectors: "The cooperation between, for example, nature protection and water protection must exist - as it is inevitably necessary, but at a slow pace in Serbia".

The fact that these changes are moving at a slow pace could be associated with the impression that the State is simply indifferent to these changes, or, perhaps, it is simply interested in changes not to occur.

"We have been in the process of European integration for more than 10 years. It is questionable what is going on, if every year we have a requirement to increase administrative capacities," says Mirko Popovic. "We come to the point - where decisions are being made.

There are people in state administration that work with environmental protection and who can deal with that burden. There are people in the private sector who since becoming a part of the common market, must develop, and they are investing in knowledge and in its staff. There is also a civil society, which can help, but at the level of political decision-making it seems as if there is a decision not to enter that process", says Popovic.

CAN YOU SEE THE AIR: Air quality is one of the key issues with regard to Chapter 27.

Although Serbia has passed the assessment of the EU for transposition, the transfer of EU legislation in our legal system did not contribute to better measurement, or to monitoring and air quality. This problem has grown so large that even the citizens and representatives

of local governments from Kraljevo, Uzice, Valjevo, Belgrade are aware they are breathing polluted air, and even recognize the source of pollution, whether it comes from the wood, coal or from the traffic.

In a sense, it is a “lucky” circumstance that such pollution can literally be “smelled” because the measurement network is unreliable. The report on the air quality by the Environmental Protection Agency states that data are properly collected from only 25 percent of measuring points. Since 2012, measurements implementation degree has been continuously declining, and it may be said that the real measurement does not exist. In addition, there is often a misconception that the air quality is more or less fine. For example, on the basis of local measurements in Kraljevo, it is known that permissible values are exceeded for more than a third of the calendar year. However, in the above-mentioned report, Kraljevo is “colored” in green, which indicates good air quality.