

Only around ten days have passed since the beginning of the year, and many environmental problems have become more visible during them.

Lim and Drina rivers are covered with waste, more than a hundred illegal landfills have been counted in Nis, and the air in Serbia has color and smell. The new 2021 started with these not so great scenes. Belgrade has been at the top of the list of cities in the world in terms of air pollution for some time now, and according to the Air Visual Air website, the capital of Serbia was the 11th most polluted in the world on Saturday. A gathering for safe air is being held in Belgrade on Sunday. Potpecko Lake near Priboj welcomed the new year in a new guise. The look that no one hoped for, but which could have been expected, say the authorities, but also the inhabitants of this part of Serbia. Tons of waste flowed down the Lim River, which is considered one of the most beautiful rivers in south western Serbia, to the dam near Priboj and Potpecko Lake. Plastic bottles, hand-held refrigerators, tires, small and slightly larger household appliances, even a coffin. Similar scenes awaited the beginning of 2021 on the Drina near Visegrad, whose tributary is the Lim. On January 5<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry of Environmental Protection in Belgrade agreed on an emergency intervention and cleaning of Potpecko Lake.

A day later, in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Drina, the removal of waste that endangered the work of the Visegrad Hydro Power Plant began, and threatens to lead to an environmental catastrophe, the authorities stated. The assumption is that the cleaning could take up to a month, and on the first day, about 100 cubic meters of waste were removed. About four thousand cubic meters of floating waste arrived at the crown of the dam in Visegrad, which could endanger the work of the HPP company on the Drina, said the director of this company, Nedeljko Perisic. Perisic told reporters that due to the large amount of water that passed through the river in recent days, the cable that should keep the floating waste broke, and with which the hydroelectric power plant has had a problem for decades. He also said that institutions from Serbia, BiH and Montenegro should be involved in solving the problem.

The Minister of Environmental Protection in the Government of Serbia, Irena Vujovic, pointed out the urgency of solving the problem and added that a large amount of garbage that ends up in rivers seriously endangers the environment.

More than two years ago, a trilateral meeting of the line ministries of the Republika Srpska, Serbia and Montenegro was held, but the problem has not been resolved, the Srna agency writes. The garbage that ends up in Lim and Drina comes from wild landfills, of which there are dozens along the entire river, and a large part that was found in Potpec Lake these days comes from the unsanitary landfill Stanjevina, which is located on the main road to

Montenegro. The landfill was closed a few months ago and its rehabilitation has begun, but the garbage still ends up in the river. In the municipality of Priboj, they claim for the BBC in Serbian that none of the garbage floating on the Lim is from their territory.

At the beginning of January, the news arrived from Nis that there were more than 100 illegal landfills on the territory of that city. Wild landfills are grouped around the riverbeds of the Nisava and South Morava, but also around agricultural crops, so that this problem affects, ecologists estimate, pollution of water, air, land, but also food that everyone consumes.

Serbian Olympian Caba Siladji also found himself in the public spotlight at the beginning of 2021 because he “dived” into waste cleaning on Divcibare mountain.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 2,305 illegal landfills were registered in Serbia in 2019, and Marko Vujic from the Center for Environmental Policy at the Faculty of Political Sciences told the Beta agency in early December 2020 that there were between 2,500 and 3,000. As he said, illegal landfills dangerously poison arable land and agricultural products. Vujic told the Beta agency that Serbia is in the first place in Europe in terms of air pollution, but that nothing is better when it comes to soil and water pollution.

The document Waste Management, published by the Environmental Protection Agency in September 2020, states that a large number of cities and municipalities in Serbia still have their own landfills. The garbage that was found in Lim near Priboj partly comes from the unsanitary landfill in Stanjevina from Prijepolje, which is located on the main road to Montenegro, along the river itself. The landfill was closed during 2020 and its rehabilitation began, and the municipal waste from Prijepolje is disposed of at the Duboki Potok landfill in Priboj, it is written in the answer that the BBC received in Serbian from the municipality of Priboj. It is just one of many such landfills in Serbia, and according to the Environmental Protection Agency, landfills with the highest risk to the environment and human health are those located at distances less than 100 meters from settlements or at distances less than 50 meters from the bank of a river, stream, lake or reservoir. As it is added, about 70 percent of active landfills are not foreseen by spatial planning documents and do not have a study on environmental impact assessment, nor do they have the necessary permits.

Landfills, both wild and municipal, are big polluters, but also a great danger – fires are frequent, and the spread of infection is possible. Hazardous waste from households, and sometimes from industry, often ends up in landfills, which further increases the danger. Dr. Danko Jovic from the Institute for Nature Protection explained at the time that the number of rodents that transmit various diseases is increasing in such places, followed by predators, from snakes to foxes and wolves. A special problem is posed by poisons that are thrown in

these places and thus lead to poisoning of wild animals through the food chain, he added. Also, waste such as paper and cardboard that can be recycled is thrown away, instead of cutting down new forests, stated Jezdimirovic.

On January 9<sup>th</sup>, Belgrade was the 11th city in the world in terms of air pollution, according to the Air Visual website. The capitals of Serbia and other Balkan countries often occupy a high position on this list. According to the data of the Global Alliance for Health and Pollution, Serbia was the first in the region in terms of mortality due to air pollution, and the ninth in the world - with 175 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. The initiative "Don't let Belgrade d(r)own", announced, referring to the data of the World Health Organization, that more than 7,000 people die prematurely in Serbia every year due to exposure to air pollution, which puts Serbia in second place in Europe, Beta reported.

Valjevo and Sremska Kamenica are the last in a series of places that received new sensors for measuring air pollution, and good news is coming from Kragujevac. The air in Serbia in the coming years should be less polluted because funds have been provided for the transition of the heating plant in Kragujevac from coal to gas, as well as for the replacement of boilers in kindergartens, schools, health centers and households to use fuels that pollute less. The heating plant in Kragujevac is one of the three large plants for the production of thermal energy in Serbia that use coal. As Dejan Stojanovic, director of the Business Association of the Heating Plant of Serbia, stated for RTS, 81 percent of the heating plants use gas, 10 percent fuel oil and nine percent coal. Apart from Kragujevac, two other large heating plants - Bor and Krusevac, mostly use coal.

And do you know how much Christmas trees affect the environment and that artificial trees are more harmful than natural ones to the environment? Dr. John Caser of the Carbon Trust, an agency that advises on climate change and sustainability, says that plastic Christmas trees are made from oil. He adds that the production of plastic wood also affects the environment, because then a large amount of industrial gases is emitted. Kazer says a two-meter-high artificial tree emits twice as much greenhouse gas as a natural tree that ends up in the trash - and as much as 10 times more than a burned Christmas tree. A topic for reflection before decorating the Christmas tree in December 2021.

Source: b92.net