

Montenegro has asked the European Commission for help in repaying its debt to China, which has built 44 kilometers of the promised 170 highways for a \$ 1 billion loan (more precisely, \$ 820 million). The European Commission has refused to repay Montenegro's debt to China, saying it cannot be held accountable for debts to third countries, but is ready to help build the rest of the highway. Bilten has repeatedly written about the methods of Chinese investment in the Balkans - they are usually reduced to the international connection of neighbors by highways, while local countries need more highways that connect the interior, as all estimates of cost-effectiveness of highway construction in the Balkans indicate that poor industry and even poorer citizens by traffic alone will not make the maintenance of these roads financially efficient.

China's goal has never been to improve local infrastructure, but to shorten the journey of its goods from China to Europe as much as possible. In addition to excessive loans, which small and / or poor countries generally cannot repay, China has also imposed its own labor force, cheap and obedient, on the countries to which it has lent. Despite numerous warnings from independent analysts, a number of Balkan countries have handed over their infrastructure projects to China. But it would be wrong to think that this was done without the blessing of both the EU and local political elites. Since the 13 + 1 summit, through new Silk Road initiatives and the like, China has invested heavily in Juncker's former EU-2007 crisis recovery plan. We never got an analysis of what was done. But we know that some countries have already suffered in the inability to repay the generous Chinese loans. Some of them are Greece (Piraeus), Sri Lanka, Ecuador and now Montenegro.

How badly Montenegro is managed, more than desperate strategic decisions, is witnessed by the situation with natural resources, on which this country is economically dependent. The best example is certainly the concession for oil and gas exploitation, sold in 2016 to foreign investors for 30 years. On that occasion, no care was taken for the protection of the sea in the event of an oil or gas spill, which would set back Montenegrin tourism, on which the country is economically too dependent. However, they may not even have to worry about pollution, as the media write that China could "take over most of the Montenegrin coast" in case the country cannot repay its debts for the highway. Montenegro's planning and environmental problems do not end there, as Chinese construction of the highway pollutes the Tara River and its canyon, which are also the most heavily protected (UNESCO). Even without Chinese help, Montenegro is doing well in its own efforts to pollute the environment. BIRN has published a report on the pollution of the Zeta River with industrial waste. From the concrete plant, through the sewer to the slaughterhouse, the river, known for its emerald color in which it used to be possible to swim, is today so polluted that the

fish caught in it and try to bake stink with a recognizable waste smell. However, as is usually the case, polluters claim that everything is in accordance with the law, inspectors in the field determine that polluters do not lie, and environmentalists photograph improvised pipes that discharge waste into the river without any purifiers. Montenegro, it seems, does not lack laws that would disable or protect something, it is no wonder, since they copy a lot of it from Croatian laws, which are often blindly translated from German ones. However, Montenegro, just like Croatia itself, lacks stricter control and implementation of these laws. Otherwise, the situation will get worse and worse, and it is to be expected that no one will move until either great public pressure occurs, or an ecological catastrophe that will leave Podgorica and the wider area without drinking water. The traditionally corrupt political elite is not in power at the moment, and whether the recent political change at the state top will be enough to enforce the laws remains to be seen. However, judging by the practice in neighboring countries, one should not have high expectations.

Source: bilten.org