

Besides the capital, Zenica is one of the most polluted cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, mainly because of its heavy industry. Therefore, the environmental oriented civil society sector is one of the most developed and active in the country. Various actions have been taken, the results are visible, but there is still much to do.

“For example, in 2014 there were as many as 252 days with sulphur dioxide, SO<sub>2</sub> concentrations above the permitted limit, while in 2018 there were `only` 125. However, we cannot be satisfied because only three days per year of those concentrations to be more than 125 micrograms is allowed”, Lemeš explained. The industrials are pretty successful in negotiating with authorities when it comes to postponing the implementation of environmental standards.

In Bosnia, as well as all over the Balkans, the leading causes of air pollution are individual heating systems that use coal or wood rather than gas, congested traffic with the vast majority of diesel vehicles and inefficient use of energy in general.

“It still happens as it was usual during the war, that people burn old clothing and footwear in their furnaces. I have heard that where whole trucks of clothes and shoes that come here as humanitarian aid people use for heating just like that. Some people even burn the garbage”, an activist from Prijedor told FairPlanet.

Back to Sarajevo, the authorities have banned diesel vehicles from the city centre, lowered the price of cable car tickets at weekends, encouraging people to spend more time at the Trebević mountain and recommended the use of protective masks outdoors.

“I truly believe the air quality is going to be the topic since it is the most important one. Spreading the anger on social media is not enough. That is why we initiated Purpleair devices to be installed in 12 cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Another twelve is about to come. People must care what they breathe. This topic must be imposed on politicians as a priority”, activist, journalist and editor of Banja Luka-based web portal BUKA Aleksandar Trifunović wrote on his Facebook.

This month the EBRD announced it is financing significant investments to improve public transport in Sarajevo, with CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions likely to exceed 30 percent. A €20 million loan will finance the overhaul of the 19.5 km-long dual-track tramlines. The current tram network is almost 50 years old and with no significant improvements in decades. A €15 million loan will cover the purchase of 25 new electric trolleybuses that will consume approximately 50 per cent less electricity, resulting in both significant cost savings and environmental benefits.

“Traffic congestion, especially during rush hour, is a severe problem in the city. The poor quality of public transport is the main reason why so many people in Sarajevo use cars,

increasing fuel consumption and noise pollution. Sarajevo is the third city in Bosnia and Herzegovina to become a member of EBRD Green Cities, after Banja Luka and Zenica”, EBRD statement reads.

A similar situation is in many Balkan cities this winter again. Serbia, North Macedonia and Croatia have recorded the pollution levels described as extremely hazardous too. Belgrade gives subsidies for vehicles that use gas and electricity. The parking is free of charge for electro vehicles. Skopje allowed public transport free of charge and increased parking tickets prices. Zagreb have advised its citizens to avoid prolonged and intense physical activity in the open air, to use public transportation rather than cars and to prevent heating with solid fuels.

Yet, both activists and politicians warn it is not only about the lack of money, the weak official response to the problem and the privileged position of the industry. It will take even more time to raise awareness among citizens themselves that is necessary they change their habits too.

“People don’t want the restriction of using cars because they are not satisfied with public transport. They don’t want the schools and kindergartens being temporarily closed because they don’t know where to put their children. They don’t want to change their heating system because they used to it. They don’t want to change their routines even if the red alarm is on. The problem cannot be solved unless every single one of us contributes”, Edin Forto Canton Sarajevo then Prime Minister said addressing the street protesters last month in Sarajevo.

Source: fairplanet.org