

In North Macedonian Banjicko Pole above the city of Gostivar, Rusino the illegal wasteland is located, whereas the river Sushicka is watering Banjicko pole and flows into the river of Vardar. Many citizens of Gostivar have pictured this location as a place for relaxation, but, instead, Rusino got the reputation of a wasteland, which according to the last data has expanded up to 120.000 square meters up to the National Park Mavrovo, whereas many people come to find their peace in the vast green area and the wood paradise. Garbage from nine municipalities from Polog region of about 120-140.000 tons a day is being disposed in this wasteland, which is often being burnt and the smell and smoke are spreading over Gostivar and its' area. This is the case this winter as well. Even though the authorities have announced that finally the wasteland will be reconstructed and a solution for this eternal problem would be found, still, the measurements of the air show that Rusino is still a problem number one for the people of Gostivar.

"Main activity was to block the road which leads to the wasteland Rusino in order for the disposal of the garbage to be stopped. Primarily, we blocked the road for all municipalities, including Gostivar as a warning, after which we started to pass only the trucks with garbage that came only from Gostivar. Main reasons why institutions approach this problem improperly and with wrong solutions are absence of sincere intentions and competent preparations. The essence of the problem with the wasteland Rusino is that the location, altitude, the wind circulation, fresh air, underground and surface waters are totally unfavorable. The location is at around 850 meters altitude, which makes it absurd, hard to reach, especially in winter periods. On the other hand, the location borders with the National park Mavrovo in a surrounding rich with woods, plants, fauna, underground and surface waters. Because of all this, "Stop Rusino" believes that the only rightful sincere solution is urgent closure of the illegal wasteland Rusino, its' reparation and returning in the primary condition. The garbage should temporarily be disposed on another wasteland or another temporary location up to the moment of finding new location through scientific approach". This is the position of the Initiative "Stop Rusino".

The wasteland Rusino previously was filled with the garbage also from the town Tetovo, from where 140.000 tons of garbage arrived on daily basis. But, in the last three years Tetovo does not disposes the garbage in Rusino. The problem escalated after a group of people from Gostivar started to investigate what kind of garbage is being disposed at the wasteland because once could see fire and smoke all the time over Gostivar in direction to Rusino. Because of this, the measurement values are so high. So, these people come to information that each day different kind of garbage is being disposed at the wasteland, as well as unidentified garbage with trucks from surrounding areas. This is the reason why

they established the citizen initiative "Stop Rusino" and the movement "Stop for the wasteland Rusino! Fresh air for Gostivar!". They blocked the entrance of the wasteland, giving the right to pass only to the trucks from the Public communal entity Gostivar, that disposes the garbage from households. This initiative has sent requests on 24th august this year to the municipality of Gostivar for closure and reparation of the wasteland for maximum period of five years, as well as for finding another location as wasteland following all standards. The initiative has also had meetings with the minister for environment and physical planning, Naser Nuredini and the mayors of Polog region, whereas it was promised the requests of the citizens to be pleased.

Meantime, despite the initiative of the activists and citizens who send requests to authorities not to legalize an entity that will run Rusino, the municipality Council at the end of October this year has elected the members of the Board of the entity "Rusino". It is interesting that the municipality Council has voted for this act with only one vote more. So, this is how the whole process for registration of the Rusino wasteland for the three Gostivar and six Tetovo municipalities became official. Deso Mateski is one of the founders of the citizen initiative "For clean Gostivar! Stop for wasteland Rusino!". Explaining the reasons of founding this initiative, he says that more than twenty years the citizens of Gostivar and its surroundings are facing problems with burning and smoke from the illegal wasteland Rusino, which, because of the natural circulation of the air, mostly comes directly to the city. And with that, according to him, not only people from Gostivar are being polluted, but also the environment and the waters that belong to the Vardar area. Mateski emphasizes that more protests have been organized whereas the citizens have given full support to the initiative. Meetings and official gatherings with all involved sides have been held. According to him there are not relevant documents for the wasteland Rusino.

"There are no property and legal solutions that will prove that the chosen location Rusino is the right one. There is project which does not take into consideration these things and offers another solution for regulation of the wasteland, while the doubts of Stop Rusino are that in this way the wasteland will be legalized and will continue to exist in the future as a risky spot for the air and the environment", from the Initiative say.

The citizen initiative has met several times with representatives of the local selfgovernment, regional centers, representatives from the Ministry of environment and physical planning as authorized ministry. There were meetings and talks with involved sides and representatives included in creation of the Project for managing the garbage in the Polog region.

„Rusino is temporary wasteland. The plan is to use it maximum 10 years. Project Rusino is very important for us because the garbage has to be disposed there in a period of few years

from now. In case we close it, then where the garbage will be disposed from all the citizens of Polog region? The idea for zero garbage there is very good and ecological, but to be true, there is no such thing as zero garbage”, the minister for environment and physical planning, Naser Nuredini stated in regards to this issue. He assures that the problem with the wasteland will be solved because for this purpose they cooperate with the Swedish secretariat SEKO which has offered money, and also there is Swiss help. That money, according to the minister, should be used for building of the road to Rusino, then setting up the measurement units, as well as setting up waste treatment plant. So, for all this to happen, the minister says, it is necessary the urbanistic plan for this region to pass. The representatives of the initiative fear that the announcement of the authorities will remain to be on paper and that the wasteland Rusino will continue to function as a wasteland whereas different garbage will be disposed, even after the proposed five years from the authorities, a period after which, namely, the wasteland should be dislocated. Meantime, the citizens of Gostivar continue to complain of the air quality.

“The air in Gostivar is still extremely polluted with high level of harmful particles. Unpleasant smell can be felt especially in the evening hours and I can confirm that it is not much different from the same period last year. Considering the situation with the pandemics and wearing masks this can not be felt drastically, but if you remove your mask, you can be suffocated from smoke and bad smell. It is really ironic, but I believe that the masks are welcomed this period, not only for protection from the pandemics, but also from the air”, a women from Gostivar told us.

We contacted the municipality Gostivar for the problem with the wasteland Rusino, using the Law for free access to the informations with public character. They responded that the plan for managing the waste in municipality Gostivar is in phase of creation. But what is interesting is that compared to the previous two years, 2018 and 2019, this year the municipality has spent smallest amount of money, or to be precise, 1 million denars compared to 1,2 million in the previous two years. We asked them to give us the reports from the inspections and controls of the wasteland Rusino concerning improper disposal and treatment of waste (especially harmful waste) according to regulations described in Law for protection of the environment, the Law for managing waste and set of rules. The representative from the municipality responded that a regional entity for managing waste in Polog region is in the phase of establishing and also a location for the new wasteland has been suggested. But, even though the authorities announce solution, the indicators for air quality in Gostivar and its' surroundings show that the situation is not pink. The pollution continues. The measurements within the monthly report for November 2020 about the

quality of the air in Gostivar show that the level of PM 10 particles are above the allowed limits almost during the whole month, or to be precise 26 days during November. On the other hand, 94 days during the year, or three months citizens from Gostivar have been suffocating by the harmful PM 10 particles since they have been above the limits. This was also the situation in the month of October this year when six days PM 10 particles have been above the allowed limits.

Anastasija Dukovska is an engineer of ecology and protection at work. She lives in Gostivar and has joined the citizen initiative believing that the institutions are not doing their job in this case. She says that the only solution for the problem with the illegal wasteland Rusino was the voice of the people to be raised. "Everyday burning of the waste that is being disposed without control from the whole Polog region is increasing the air pollution", she says. Besides this, she believes that the wasteland itself and the structure of the soil which is porous are not rightfully chosen and beside the air pollution this results also in pollution of the soil and waters. She has been participating in all initial meetings with the municipality and the authorized ministry. She believe that now it is the institutions' turn to listen to the voice of the people until the final closure of the illegal wasteland, a period after which the revitalization of the land of location should happen. The revision of the plan for managing the waste and its' changes are of no meaning to Mateski until the law does not affects all and is implemented. The representatives of the initiative "Stop Rusino" fear that the things will be carried out rightfully. Mateski explains that almost three years the project for rehabilitation and closure of the wasteland Rusino exists only on paper. He adds: "Luckily, on the field, nothing has been done. We would like this to stays as it is until our request -stop for wasteland Rusino is fulfilled, after which money can be invested In rehabilitation of the location, cleaning and step by step revitalization of the waters, soil and the woods nearby", Mateski emphasizes.

Source: en.scoop.mk